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LADY GRIZEL.

An Impression of a Momentous Epoch.

BY THE

HON. LEWIS WINGFIELD,

AUTHOR OF "SLIPPERY GROUND," ETC., ETC.

"Houses, churches, mixed together ;
Streets unpleasant in all weather ;
Prisons, palaces contiguous,
Gates, a bridge, the Thames irriguous.
Warrants, bailiffs, bills unpaid ;
Lords of laundresses afraid.
Rogues that nightly rob and shoot men ;
Hangmen, aldermen, and footmen.
Many a beau without a shilling ;
Many a widow not unwilling ;
Many a bargain if you strike it ;
This is LONDON—How d'ye like it ?"
HUMOURS OF THE TIMES, A.D. 1758,
British Museum.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



LONDON :

RICHARD BENTLEY AND SON,

Publishers in Ordinary to Her Majesty the Queen.

1878.

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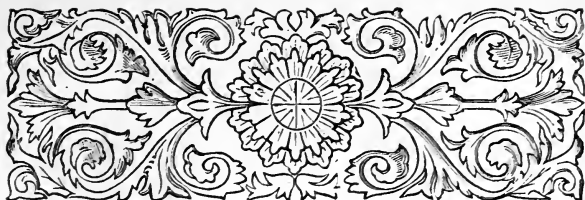
TO HER GRACE
THE DUCHESS OF WESTMINSTER,
THIS CHRONICLE OF A STRANGE CAREER
IS BY PERMISSION
Dedicated.

George Ray 20 Aug 51 9.16 30

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LADY GRIZEL.

CHAPTER I.

THE BATH IN 1747.

“ T ten of the clock the block was fixed on the scaffold, and his lordship's coffin brought, with this inscription on the lid : ‘ Simon Dominvs Fraser de Lovat, decollat. April 9, 1747. Æt. suæ. 80.’ At eleven my lord drank a little burnt brandy, mounted the steps of the scaffold, and after examining the axe, repeating the while some lines of Horace, kneeled down before the block——”

A pretty lad, clad in pale blue and silver, was painfully striving to decipher the crabbed characters of a letter which he rested on his mother's knee, but as he stumbled over his task his lips quivered and his eyes swelled till his voice failed him altogether,

and, flinging his arms around the lady's waist, he burst into tears. A pale child in a mob-cap, who sat on the floor hard by, turned her large lustrous eyes on him, and howled too out of mere sympathy.

What a vastly pretty pair were these two—the stoutly-built blonde boy and the delicate black-haired maid—a vastly pretty pair!

“Himmel! what ails de shilder?” cried the lad's mother in shrill broken English. “Monsieur Stone, look to it. His Highness's education is schändlich! If de Prince of Wales were not so busy mit de baiting of bears at Hockley-in-de-Hole, maybe he would see to his eldest poy.”

The Princess of Wales pushing aside her tambour turned to enlist the sympathies of her ladies with respect to her royal spouse's peccadilloes. Indeed she was always full of complaints concerning him, and with more show of reason than many querulous wives; for Frederick, eldest son of George II., was, if possible, more contemptible than was his father. His temper was more obstinate, his understanding weaker, his selfishness as stupendous. He was fond, moreover, of low company, consorting with prizefighters, supping frequently with the royal midwife—and this last crime was looked upon by the people as worst of all, for in the year of grace 1747 a gulf yawned between upper and lower classes which, as in my old age I write this chronicle, time and strange events are beginning to fill up.

“Little Prince George has three tutors,” cried the Princess, emphasising her words with a needle. “Three! A *grand milord*, a bishop, and dis Monsieur Stone. He is nine years old and can hardly read. Quelle scandale! I complain to his Highness of dis Monsieur Stone, and his Highness only laugh at me. He dress himself *superbe* in velvet, dis Monsieur Stone, and dine at taverns mit Monsieur Wilkes, *qui est par trop vicieux*, and neglects his charge.”

Mr. Stone bowed low as he strove to parry the attack of the Princess, smiling quietly to himself as he replied :

“Poor Mr. Wilkes is the gayest companion in all England, madam. If your Highness would allow me to present him, you would, I warrant, fall under the spell. As to my charge, I can do little with him. He is good, but incorrigibly idle. My Lord Harcourt, chief governor, is a mere pageant. So that the future King of England acquires the grand air, he deems book-learning but of little worth. The bishop, as all the world knows, was a buccaneer before he assumed the cassock. Nor hath he thought it needful to change his way of life. His jovial Grace drinks with drunkards, lives with sinners, and herds with infidels for dinners. If I were trusted with the sole and entire charge of his Highness, then perhaps——”

“That you will never be,” retorted the Prince of

Wales, who during this colloquy had been lolling and yawning in his chair, alternately dragging the watch from either fob out of sheer laziness. "No, no; my good Stone; don't be ambitious. That the lad cannot read matters little. It ill becomes a prince to be a pedant. But I do not like his being a milksop. Pho! To howl about a traitor's death. There! hand the letter to Grizel; she's sturdy enough—ought to have been a man, instead of a maid-of-honour."

Mr. Stone said nothing, but his sinister eyes flashed for an instant on the Prince of Wales, then froze under the cold mask of discipline.

Lady Grizel took the letter in her large shapely hand, and read on :

"Having placed his neck upon the block, in half a minute he dropped his kerchief, and the headsman, being now more expert at his business, thanks to experience with the other lords, severed the head from the body with one blow, both of which were placed in one coffin and taken back to the Tower."

"So ends a bloody drama!" remarked Henry Fox, who was sipping his morning glass of tepid water.

"So end all traitors," added the Prince of Wales. "They don't love our family much, these English people; but they like us better than the Jacobites, who in the last rising brought home the horrors of

civil war to them. Thanks to them at least for that."

A dreamy young lady who sat behind him (the second maid-of-honour, in fact) sighed deeply as she drew the little girl towards her and kissed away her tears.

"You may well sigh, Lady 'Gladys," murmured a tall gentleman beside her, sadly. "Tullibardine, Balmerino, Kilmarnock, Lovat ! unfortunate gentlemen. We must lament that such steadfast spirits—worthy of the best days of virtuous Rome—should have been sacrificed to the hopeless efforts of a degraded family whose incompetence hath proved their ruin ! This corrupt age of ours shows us few such."

"Always high-flown, Mr. Pitt," laughed Henry Fox. "You are too good for us. What a pity we can't live in the epoch of our choice."

"My opinions may not be popular, neither do I run the race of popularity."

"You assume antique virtue. In this wicked world we must float with the stream or be drowned."

"Or by stemming turn the tide," retorted Mr. Pitt sternly—"the vile muddy tide. This is an age without honour or decency. Men are venal and debased ; women mere painted, unprincipled, charming butterflies. Patriotism dies with these erring Northern lords. A patriot in these days is but a candidate for a sinecure. Politics, the art of obtain-

ing a snug berth. Religion, a bugbear to fright children withal."

Mr. Fox shook back his ruffles and laughed aloud. It was such fun to trot out the hobbies of this white-visaged young Pitt, who prated of fame, of virtue, and other eccentricities, and took refuge from the fashionable follies of his day in the pages of the Latin poets; who was never known to play Faro, or go a-wenching, or crack a festive bottle at a tavern. True, though but eight-and-thirty or thereabouts, he was already a martyr to the gout, which might partly account for his odd ways. And was it not rare sport to draw him out, to make him at will, like a Jeremiahs, lift up his voice in lamentation? Mr. Fox at least thought so, for to the lack of principle of a Frenchman he joined the habits of a Malay. He was a libertine with a nascent love of pelf, and was wont to horrify Mr. Pitt by boldly unveiling the guiding-spring of his life, which was an ever-growing respect for the God of Mammon. Anything can be done with money, he was continually repeating. *Ergo*, money-grubbing is the only fit occupation for a gentleman; not by vulgar usury or anything low, but by bringing each career, whatever it may be, into subserviency to the one end. At any rate Mr. Fox could not complain of having been born in an unfitting epoch.

Mr. Pitt was his exact antithesis. He actually quailed and shook with horror over Fox's sentiments.

The bait was always sure to bring a bite, nor did it fail on this occasion.

“Money! Money! is the cry on all sides,” he went on. “Alas for England! she buffets vainly in a sea of self-interest. Her children drain her life. Give, give! they cry. Gold, more gold! The strength and power of the State is wasting daily. The head of England is humbled before Europe. None so poor now as to do her reverence! Robert Walpole used to say, ‘England should give laws to the world.’ Such a thing may never be—never, never!”

His melodious voice died in a sigh, like the chord of an Æolian harp. Æolian harps set some people’s teeth on edge. The shrill Princess shivered and cried out:

“Mein Gott! Monsieur Bidd! Cessez donc. She is a dismal horrid place, your England, filled with dull beebles. Every man in England is talking of his stupid politics, every woman of her ugly clothes. As for you, you make mein blut run cold like a Cassandra. Give me my second glass of water, and bid the band play a merry jig, you complete raven!”

And yet the scene upon which the Princess looked out was lively enough. Tiers of nobly proportioned houses of hewn stone rose one above the other from among gardens and orchards, rosy with the promise of spring. Around circled a range of wooded hills, so distinct in the clear atmosphere of early morning, that each vista of wide street seemed abruptly closed

with a wall of tender green. Along the centre of the valley meandered a silver thread, lost here and there in the tangle of overhanging boughs and the pale pink of opening blossoms. It was the smoothly-gliding Avon, which whispered as it went of the strange doings in this city of Bath—laughed and murmured of human folly as it swept along; then brawled proudly as it rushed over the weir of the holy resting-place it would pass presently, where the sins and sorrows—the petty fretting and noisy discontent—of the world of fashion would be forgot beside the tomb of England's kingliest king.

Over the weir, under Pulteney Bridge crowned with its diadem of palaces, it swept, pausing for rest in shady pools to mark the long shadows of towering mansions on its breast—whereon were pictured, in fleeting vision, many an abigail with jaded mouth and sunken eye as she wearily flung a casement open to banish the fumes of the last night's debauch.

The river, as it flowed, never found Bath asleep, for indeed Bath never slept. All day long, from morn till dusk, the dusty roads of approach re-echoed with the din of wheels—flying machines, whiskies, wagons, chaises, clattering down the steep inclines, to overturn probably at the bottom; then when righted on their crazy straps and wooden perches with groans and curses, to rattle and wheeze after hairbreadth escapes and perils into the friendly

haven of the Bear or the White Hart. Fine ladies were never tired of toiling up the hills to show the gilded sculpture on their creaking coaches, while troops of beaux threaded among them in and out through blinding dust to air a new brodered coat or exhibit the perfection of their horsemanship. And what a heat and bustle in the crowded streets ! What a constant patter of wooden heels on the broad flags ; what an echo of mincing steps ! What an unending cry of "By your leave," as (by their leave or not) chairmen forced a way amongst the throng, or footmen elbowed a passage for their mistresses ! What a singular confluence of un-mixing waters—the rich, the poor, the vulgar, the genteel, the sick, the strong in health ! Princes of the blood and peers with star and ribbon. Upstarts of fortune ; negro-drivers from plantations far away ; sharpers, bullies, cripples, tradesmen, highwaymen ; all jostling towards the public bath, or crowding, in eagerness for news, about coffee-house doors.

As day gave place to night the racket knew no ceasing. The Assembly-rooms upon the North Parade close by the river, were gay with many a light, which threw long shadows across the bowling-green below, down to the water's brink. There the young flocked to move a minuet, while the old wrangled over the ace of spades. There the young ladies of quality footed a country-dance, or Louvre, or Passepiéd with a hairdresser, while

mamma boldly cheated her London purveyor of bohea. The waters were flowing apparently together for awhile. They ran side by side but did not really mingle; for persons of quality looked on the lower orders as on strange dogs or parrots which might be toyed with when the whim took them, then cast aside. The sailor's landlady from Wapping trod on my lord chancellor's gouty toe, and playfully returned his oaths with interest. But hark! the clock of the ancient Abbey chimes eleven. Mr. Nash (better known as King of Bath, and Marshal of the Black Ace), stops the band, for his will is law, his despotism supreme. The tea-merchant ruefully pays to the dowager the profit wrung from her London custom. The peruke-maker bows his best bow to the earl's daughter. Night is made hideous by the shouts of serving-men. Chairs swing along flagged alleys (like corks bobbing on ditch waters), each one preceded by its flambeau. Round the old Abbey's feet surge myriad twinkling lights like glow-worms at a merry-making—vanishing among the trees of the Orange Grove, along the high stone-girt ramparts of the North Parade, under the swaying signs of Stall Street, and the grey line of the venerable borough walls. Fashion is going to bed? No! See how each window brightens along the steep street which leads to the Circus and the upper town. The cream of rank inhabits those finely-sculptured mansions. Chair-

men discharge their glittering loads, and rolling themselves in long coats settle down to snore beneath the stars. For rank and fashion is only *beginning* the night. The sun peeping in will look on wine and cards. Verily the God Trump's favourite shrine is Bath, and Hoyle is his prophet. Thither flock, when it seems good to them, all that is richest, gayest, wittiest, in England, to mingle with the crippled and the sick. Why? To dally for stomach-sake with tepid water, to batten on the delights of Faro and quadrille, and the joys of E. O., and the new game called whist.

At dawn the beau reels off to bed; her Grace looks peevishly out on the silver stream—the passing scavenger—and shuts out the garish day. Surely Bath will now go to rest? No. The other portion of the hive is up and stirring; the pump-room is besieged. The public bath in view of the whole street is full of half-clad quality; the roads alive with newly-arrived chaises. The Abbey bells ring out in honour of a new arrival; the city waits attend with madrigals; the courtyards of the Bear and Hart are crowded with grooms, postilions; horses wincing and lashing out under the currycomb. Valetudinarians seek to creep unharmed between avenues of flying heels on this their only way to the wells. Ladies are carried in their chairs through the courtyard of the Bear, and here, from the stablemen no doubt, they learn the ingenious expletives

with which it is their polite habit to garnish their conversation.

Early in the morning it must be admitted that Bath doth not look well. She doth things in public which befit a more private scene. Soil of all kinds, tossed from door and window, litters the flags. Inquiring pigs issue from secret haunts, to appraise the foulness of the offal. Butchers slay and prepare their meat before their doors, bleeding their beasts into the kennel. Housewives go through an outward ceremony of washing clothes in the common conduit. Dames *en deshabille* in close chip-hats and frayed unclean brocades, pick their way amongst unpleasing trifles towards the king's bath, while beggars and market wenches lean elbows on the Stall Street parapet, staring at the statue of Bladud and raddled fashion in the scummy water. For the steaming stew is open to the air. Her Grace, in a cotton wrapper with a kerchief stuck in her hat for the sake of her perspiration, here meets the bohea merchant whom she robbed the night before, both decorously buried to the chin in opalescent soup beset with motes. She clings to the same brass ring with him to steady her steps, offers him snuff or a sniff at the nosegay which floats before her on a tray, and mops her heated brow as she nods to a peeling countess opposite. Truly vanity may not be counted among the vices of these ladies, or they could not expose the chipped paint of their

cheeks and lips to the gaze of quality at the pump-room window above. The fresh market-wench marvels, as she rests her basket for a moment on the low wall, that this should be called "beauty" by the great. Hodge, the plough-boy, as she well knows, is quite content with the downy peach-texture of her cheek. Well, well! the quality and the poor are vastly wide apart sure-ly. Chirruping a carol she wends her way, while a fashionable lover in curlpapers looks down on his adored, whose smeared roses are unbecomingly mingled with blurred lilies, and consoles himself for her battered aspect with the thought that the dip improves her health, while as for her complexion, will it not be as faultlessly pink and white as ever by dinner-time? Moreover I must remind my grand-children that in these days of my youth squalor and grandeur were always cheek by jowl. Stiffest brocades and strings of costly pearls covered underlinen which—well, it was washed once a month in the common conduit. I remember that the most fastidious beau in Bath perched in a low-browed tenement down a dark alley, whose crazy windows looked out on the pig-sty. The ceiling of his one room was blackened by the flaring of an ill-smelling link set in a silver sconce. The dirt on his floor was hidden under a wash of soot and small-beer; his furniture was of the scantiest; yet he emerged daily from his chrysalis a splendid butter-

fly in all the glorious panoply of flour and salmon satin worked with gold. The patrician and the beggar dwelt side by side. Mushroom hovels grew about palace-gates. Lazarus looked wistfully at Dives as he cantered by, but never a crumb did he receive in passing. The meteor flashed and was gone, and Lazarus drew close his rags and cursed him. But let me raise again the phantom of the past on the mirror of memory.

See! The dowager emerges from her bath, and having in a convenient closet renewed the scattered glories of her skin, proceeds to join the ranks of fashion in the pump-room above. She drinks her jorum of lukewarm water, curtseys to royalty, consumes the last scandal, breakfasts in public with her chosen gossips, then retires to the milliner's across the little court to weep over the last novel till 'tis time to array herself for dinner. By three o'clock the heaviest headed of the gambling set are up and ready for the fray again. All Bath unites at dinner, then promenades under Harrison's sycamores by Avon's bank till the hour comes round for driving, and so the endless wheel of fashion twirls, and Bath is never allowed one hour of rest.

The pump-room is the favourite resort of the Princess of Wales during her annual sojourn with her court at Bath. It amuses her to watch the people in the tank below, whilst holding a morning

levee of her lord's adherents. She ever liked Bath better than London, for in the latter city she could not avoid perceiving how the quality was hated by the scum. People were always saying rude things within her hearing, wishing his gracious Majesty at the devil, or what not. She could not help knowing that George II. could boast of the unusual distinction of being loathed and despised by all his subjects, and she rather enjoyed it, for that gracious monarch was sworn enemy to his eldest son (her husband) and all that belonged to him. But then the honest London burghers discovered also that Frederick was no whit less disreputable than his royal parent, and began to detest him equally, together with the posse of his bedizened friends and favourites. Not that any one desired to thrust the new family from the throne. The exiled House of Stuart was infinitely worse than the reigning House of Brunswick. Moreover, the details of the late rising (of which Lord Lovat was the last victim) were fresh in the minds of all. A great horror of Jacobitism and of Jacobites invaded the public mind. True, George was a disgrace to human nature, but so also was the Chevalier to a yet deeper degree. People were resolved then to endure their fate with as little grimacing as they might, looking hopefully forward to a better day somewhere in the dim future; but they took little trouble to conceal their sentiments from the ken of either King or

Prince. Nobody likes to bear curses and visible signs of opprobrium more than is absolutely needful. Therefore the Princess always enjoyed her sojourn at the Bath, for the people who grimaced and growled never went thither, and she was able to forget for awhile that the public disliked the royal father and the royal son equally, distrusted his Majesty's ministers, and were altogether exceedingly disgusted with their fate. The King and his court, and the Heir-apparent and his court, were in the position of natural enemies united for the nonce against a common foe. The court of the Prince of Wales always followed him when he went to the Bath, and the Princess, his spouse, always deemed the pump-room a fitting point of vantage from whence to contemplate her world.

She is contemplating her world now from her watch-tower. Her subjects defile before her each morning on this little square of stones, for hither each modish man or woman must come to drink the daily modicum of water. The pump-room occupies one end of a small paved yard, its three entrances being approached by a few steps. The old Abbey, with its bellowing chimes and crumbling saints, stands at the other ; while its two sides are bounded by rows of chocolate-houses and milliners' shops, in one or other of which fricassees of news are constantly being cooked for the delectation of the royal palate. One coffee-house is sacred to the doctors

who sit in solemn conclave hour after hour blinking at cripples like vultures spying out carcasses—a row of funereal suits, gold-headed canes, and portentous perukes. Through an archway leading into Stall Street a constant bustle is visible in the White Hart yard, and great is the commotion in the royal circle when an unfamiliar coach draws up, and the bells peal out their welcome. Her Highness never fails with undignified eagerness to drop her needle, exclaiming: “Grizel, my loafe! Go zee oo’s gum!” And the beautiful maid of honour instantly sweeps her grand skirts across the yard, followed by a bevy of adorers, scattering the maimed and halt who doze in the sun, in order to learn every particular for her mistress without delay relative to the new arrival.



CHAPTER II.

AN HEIR-APPARENT'S FOLLOWERS.



S a new-comer to Bath, I must present you to their Highnesses.

Augusta, Princess of Saxe-Gotha, was never pretty. At her best she was tall, angular, bony; with arms of unnatural length which resembled a pair of oars. At the time when our story opens, her voice was shrill, her temper acid, her neck like unto a corkscrew. She rated her tire-women in language more forcible than lady-like. She was querulous because, poor thing, nobody on the world's face loved her, and indeed there was not much that was lovable about the Princess of Wales. According to the sublime theory of the equalisation of matter, she must have had a charm of some kind if one could only find it. She was a Princess, which was something, and had a tender heart which longed to hang itself on some one's breast. That she should

love her husband was out of the question. She could only despise Prince Frederick, and moreover it is as much a tradition of the House of Brunswick that wives should hate their husbands as that fathers should detest their sons.

The royal pair were as usual surrounded by their household, as well as by a mob of adventurers of every degree. Men of virtue and of wit, time-servers, rufflers, gamblers; eagles and owls, doves and cormorants;—all plumed themselves under the smile of their future King.

Behind the Princess, seated on low chairs, were her two maids of honour. The one, comely and sweet-looking, was Lady Gladys, daughter of the Duke of Richmond, whose eldest girl eloped with Henry Fox. That gentleman may thus be said to have set the dangerous fashion of clandestine marriages which afterwards became the rage, and to have rendered modish the vast crew of Fleet parsons, who, by placing temptation within reach, wrought havoc in many a noble family. Lady Gladys had yet one other sister, Sarah, a child in a mob-cap who was with her at the Bath. That black-eyed beauty was little Prince George's prime favourite and chosen playfellow, and verily, as folks frequently remarked, the two children made a vastly pretty pair.

The other maid of honour was Lady Grizel—fairest of the fair. Who may hope to describe that

marvellous beauty, whose grandeur electrified even the rough Irish chairman as he closed his lid over her stately head? The purely-modelled features; the finely-chiselled nose, the scornful mouth, the liquid eye, whose sapphire blue was set off by dark silken lashes; above all, the clear ivory skin (never daubed with paint), which was only one shade more creamy than the luxuriant masses of her highly-powdered hair. She knew that she was peerless among the beautiful, for she read the fact in the ogle of each beau, and swept on smiling with tip-tilted nose, walking unharmed over rows of bleeding hearts, as whilom Cunegunda did on red-hot ploughshares. Behind her, like a shimmering trail of light upon the sea, lay those rows of shattered hearts. She took up none upon her march, sagely remarking, when reproached for cruelty, that it is wonderful how easily broken hearts are mended. Women shook their heads, vowing that the maid of honour would surely come to shipwreck. Young Mr. Pitt thought otherwise. He believed in the theory of the Beautiful and Good. Surely so fair a casket should contain an angel's soul, which for example's sake would linger awhile, then speed upwards to a more fitting station. Sure none would harm so beautiful a thing, to look on which was in itself a privilege. But Mr. Pitt, though a clever and rising young man, was not infallible. Lady Grizel was wild; given to skipping after the manner

of a fawn. She was living, too, in a wicked world. Would her masculine turn of mind, her sturdy independent spirit, save her from snares and pitfalls? We shall see. Her mistress, the Princess, looked gravely sometimes on her escapades, saying that she out-heroded Herod even in an age of license; but the young lady laughed and rippled out a blithe roulade, and her Highness, smiling, tapped her cheek, declaring there was naught to be done with such a "zaucy buss."

Everybody loved Lady Grizel for her spontaneous gaiety and unaffected enjoyment of life, just as people love to watch a butterfly flitting like a jewel endowed with movement amongst sunlit flowers. Which of us may deny the occult power of the Beautiful? None of Prince Frederick's lords were prepared to do so. On the contrary, they one and all grovelled at her dainty feet, swearing that she was lovelier than Helen of Troy—that she was Perfection come down to earth—laying the responsibility of her wild ways and carelessness of the world's opinion upon the strange schooling of her earlier years. For although now, at seventeen, she was the reigning toast, the champion heart-breaker, the favourite maid of honour of a prospective Queen of England, yet the early girlhood of Lady Grizel was spent in grinding poverty and trouble. Her father, Earl Gowering, died intestate when she was but two years old, leaving his wife and daughter to

the care of a bastard son. The fortune and title strayed off to an unknown heir, and the three were left face to face with penury. A great name fills no stomach, as Lady Grizel found to her cost. Her mother, too proud to proclaim her state, sold her jewels, and kept a small lodging-house during the remainder of her life in a remote western town; and there, rocked by Atlantic billows, the neglected child grew up to womanhood, whilst her mother trembled at her increasing beauty. Untamed as the seamew, she sported on the cliffs, worshipped as divine by the rough sailor lads, wandering hand in hand sometimes with her tall grave brother, whose stern face was the image of her own without its brightness. There she learned that she was beautiful, and began to loathe her coarse woollen gown, trimming its scant folds with such bits of finery as the lapping waters threw up at her feet. On the remote western headland she dragged out a monotonous existence, dreaming with discontent of grand dead ancestors and her own piteous lot—dreaming of how John, Earl Gowering, received a kiss from Elizabeth herself as a reward for the first news of the Armada's rout; of how Maurice, thirteenth Earl, rode into London with the Second Charles; of how Gerard, fifteenth Earl, was honoured by a hand-shake from the gloomy William. Yet, here was she, direct heiress of their ancient name, a-running of messages on a shingly beach, or scheming of dinners for vulgar

farm-folk—simply because her father forgot to make a will before entering on a shameful tavern brawl. She hated his memory for the wrong done to her, his sole legitimate offspring. What a pity that Jasper was a *bastard*. But for that envious bend-sinister he would have slid into his father's seat and all would have been well, for she and Jasper loved one another despite their disparity in years, as the ivy loves the oak, the oak the ivy. Jasper was always all that was good and kind, but then she had imbibed with mother's-milk the prevailing contempt for a bend-sinister. It was amusing to mark the motherly airs of the little damsel towards her big brother. She loved, and patronised, and half feared him in her heart, the only being on earth she ever feared. He loved, and chid, and pitied her, for was it not sad to see such high-born loveliness wasted among boors?

A time came when brother and sister were parted. The Countess Gowering died, and the Prime Minister, hearing of her daughter's case, procured for her the post of maid of honour to the Princess of Wales. Sweet are the uses of adversity, we are told. Poverty had no sweets for Lady Grizel. In after days she retained a fierce enjoyment of the good things of this world, bred of that grinding early time; an unromantic appreciation of wealth and grandeur such as few can feel who have not gone supperless to bed. From the moment she

appeared at court her triumph was complete. All were enchanted by the lovely madcap. Such beauty and so old a name were voted an ample dowry. Peers of all ranks were suitors for her hand. For a time she scoffed at all. The Princess of Wales bethought herself that the girl might be made useful as a bait to secure some important personage for her lord's party against the King's. It behoved her to lure away as many as might be from his Majesty's side to that of the Heir-apparent, so she decided that Lady Grizel's hand should be a reward for such defection. There was the old Duke of Tewkesbury, for example, a hoary old reprobate, who could not be got to declare himself. He was past seventy certainly, but then he was also the richest and greatest duke of England. Lady Grizel, however, declined the intended honour.

"No," she said; "he is a toothless lion. Let him be. He is an old dear, and I love to tease him; but as to becoming *première duchesse* at so great a sacrifice, no! I am over young to be his wife."

Then she reflected that it might be as well to be a duchess, after all, and finally threw the handkerchief to the young Duke of Hamilton, who was preparing his trunks for the grand tour. She did not love his Grace, but saw in him the making of a very proper husband. A noble pair they looked as they plighted their troth. The Prince of Wales swore with unnecessary oaths that he would see the knot

tied before the young gentleman started on his travels, but Lady Grizel, with wit beyond her years, declared that those travels should be his probation; that he should write to her post by post, and claim her on his return home after coquetting with Vanity Fair and combating Apollyon in the form of foreign nymphs.

Alas for the constancy of man! Apollyon triumphed. When you are now introduced to her in the Bath pump-room her swain has been abroad two years, and hath writ but one short letter to his affianced during all that time!

How has the girl borne the insult? you will ask, no doubt. Has she wasted, or fumed, or pined, or refused her food? Not she. Women of her mould have tripped smiling to the stake. She drives the young men crazy with her tricks. She invents dreadfully bewitching morning caps, from under which she laughs at the wheezy old Duke of Tewkesbury, who swears by his gods that this delicious morsel shall some day be his. Some day, indeed! Sure he cannot have so many yet to live! She hath furnished fine rooms in Monmouth Street, Soho, where, when off duty, she ravishes the beaux with noisy suppers. After all, save as a matter of pride, why should she regret the fickle one? There are more fish in the sea, as an old adage saith. Yet while she sang, her heart was torn and rent. Her besetting sin was pride, and it hurt her much that

the man she chose should treat her thus. Perhaps it was all a mistake. Couriers may break their necks or lose their despatches. She would wait awhile in case the matter might be explained. The Duke would return home—when? Alas! his faithlessness left her in ignorance. Oh, if he really meant to jilt her! The idea was maddening, for Lady Grizel was exceeding proud.

Yes: pride is the family failing, for Jasper, too, was proud, who seldom saw his sister now. The bastard was too poor and too haughty to flaunt his bend-sinister at court. When his sister was borne from him he was glad that she should take a place in her fitting sphere, and was pleased to be relieved from a grave responsibility. Then he started on his solitary road in pursuit of a name (for his father gave him none), and the next news the maid of honour had of him was that the imprudent young man had been taken at Culloden, fighting under the rebel flag. Then she wrung her hands and wept, and all the beaux wept too, regardless of their rouge, because their goddess was in sorrow; and the Prince of Wales vowed that for her sake, however great a traitor, the delinquent should be freed. As she sat on her chair behind her Royal Highness, she was in a fever (albeit her face was like marble), for the only one on earth who was tied to her by blood—save an old aunt who abode here at Bath—was riding along the London road to thank her for his liberty

and life, bearing too, perhaps—who knows?—news of the vanished Duke of Hamilton. But now it is time you should more closely contemplate the rest of the group who stand around their Highnesses.

The most interesting of the party were William Pitt and Henry Fox, because both were candidates for the highest honours of St. Stephen's, and both had already mounted the first rung on the ladder of fame. Pitt was made Paymaster-General the previous year, while Fox, about the same time, became Secretary at War. They were both looked upon as "coming men," and the Prince of Wales was no little proud of having added two such promising colts to his paddock. Mr. Pitt, indeed, was a Lord of his Bedchamber, and therefore held as it were in double vassalage, which was an extra feather in the Prince's cap; Mr. Pitt being generally accepted as the more capable of the two young warriors. What a contrast were the pair! Fox fat, idle, licentious, grasping, unscrupulous. Pitt tall, graceful, dignified, virtuous. Already his speeches in Parliament were listened to with respect. The foolish Prime Minister, his goggle-eyed Grace of Newcastle, was terrified by his sarcasms, stricken dumb by the menacing flashes of his commanding eye. He had been advised—this foolish Duke whose feeble hand was daily steering his country's bark closer to the rocks—to make conciliatory overtures to the young man. But he had always shaken his head, saying help-

lessly, "This terrible fellow is too dangerous. How can I hold him? He has not a *vice*. His foible is not even personal ambition. His honesty in these degenerate days would bring us to inevitable ruin. What? a man who never drinks, or gambles, or spends his nights at hazard, or affects jockeydom at Newmarket. A man who professes to *love his country for herself*! The man's a prodigious monster. No, no! I prefer Fox, who is a man of the world, and understands his epoch and a bribe as well as most men."

Moreover, his Gracious Majesty himself began to look with vague apprehension at young Mr. Pitt as a dreadful firebrand who treated Hanover as a potato-plot, instead of as a Garden of Eden; who did not admire German ankles, German waists, or German pickled cabbage. Hanover was the apple of his Majesty's eye, therefore he who presumed not to love Hanover was, of necessity, his Majesty's enemy. Now he who was the King's enemy became by that fact the beloved of his undutiful son Prince Frederick. Hence the position Mr. Pitt held at the Prince's court, and hence the objection of his Grace of Newcastle to burn his fingers with him. And so Mr. Pitt, at thirty-nine, was Lord of the Bedchamber to the Prince of Wales and Paymaster-General—no more—and ate his virtuous heart out day by day as humiliation was poured upon humiliation on his country's head by the foolishness and incompetence of the purblind Prime Minister.

Mr. Fox, on the other hand, coquetted with all parties. Professing no principle but love of himself, he was all things to all men; kissing the chalkstones on old George II.'s knuckles one day, the soft white fingers of the Prince of Wales the next. The only time he ever committed himself was when he eloped with the sister of Lady Gladys, and created a scandal by wedding a duke's daughter at the Fleet. Great was the outcry at the time, for till he set the fashion, none but low people sought out the services of a drunken brandy-parson. But once the example set, it became modish to be tied up on the sly. Indeed, such was the feverish love of excitement which characterised those good old days when I was young, that idle lordlings and ladykins from mere *désœuvrement* would pop forth in an hackney coach, be married, and quietly come home again. The amusement was cheap at a guinea, and what easier than to annul the ceremony by a second piece of gold? The sole registers employed in weddings of this kind were the pencilled entries in a drunkard's greasy note-book, which he copied or not into a larger and more orthodox volume according to the desires of the wedded. A dirty scrap of paper is easily torn up, and a guinea is a guinea all the world over.

Dear heart! what strange things we did in those days long ago, before his present decorous Majesty, King George III., taught us to be respect-

able. A loyal aristocracy always follows the lead of its chief, and it must be admitted that the behaviour of the Second George was but an ill example. A disreputable King whom everybody hated, a Queen who hated her husband and her son. A bevy of daughters who washed linen of the dirtiest kind under the noses of all about them. *Quel example!*

Happy's the wooing that's not long a doing. Many a belle have I known who, to clear herself of debt, hath espoused a "professional husband" hired for the ceremony, and then, pleading coverture, hath snapped her pretty fingers in the faces of her duns. The proceeding was ever safe for both parties, for husband and wife parted as they met. She never revealed her husband's dwelling that he might be pursued by an irate milliner or mantua-maker *because she never knew it*. Thanks to the new mode, the brandy-parsons made quite a comfortable income out of their note-books, for gentlemen in high places were content to pay an occasional guinea now and then to keep their amorous proceedings dark, and the two classes came at length to work so well together that the parsons, out of complaisance, left blank spaces in their books lest any one should have occasion to desire a marriage ante-dated. Things came to such a pitch at last that you could obtain a certificate at a certain brandy-shop, called the Bull and Garter,

without the trouble of a ceremony at all ! But such confusion was found to arise from this ingenious arrangement that ministers were obliged to put down the traffic altogether, and in 1753 a law was passed condemning every future marriage as illegal which should be solemnised without banns or license. We are now dealing, however, with 1747.

There was a third gentleman standing near the Princess who affected the court circle, and who just now was bending over Lady Grizel as he toyed with his muff, whispering tender nothings to which she listened half-amused. Unlike young Pitt and Fox, he was not a politician. He was not angling for a sinecure, neither was he writhing under the blunders of a prime minister. No. He was a soldier, as might be seen by his military wig, his scarlet coat faced with black, and buff vest with crowns upon the buttons. This was the Honourable Jack Bellasis, only brother of my Lord Bellasis, a very pretty fellow after whose *beaux yeux* half the court ladies languished. Though he, like most younger sons, was poor, yet had he quite the grand air ; his person was well formed ; his mincing gait was perfect. Many a painted houri had striven to decoy him to the Fleet, but the Honourable Jack knew better. Indeed some said that he was saved from such folly by hopeless love, but whether he hankered after Lady Gladys or Lady Grizel gossip was uncertain. He was as yet himself uncertain ;

neither did it matter much, for the one maid-of-honour was betrothed to a duke, whilst the other would never be allowed to wed a younger son. Lady Gladys on her side was evidently in love with him. She followed his movements with her eyes, flushed scarlet when he entered the pump-room, thought that no one could drink tepid water so gracefully as he. Yet how foolish it all was! She was too proper to elope as her elder sister had done, and so probably was he, for the Honourable Jack, if an Adonis, was decidedly prim, with antiquated ways and narrow old-fashioned ideas. Sure these two would never visit the Fleet together. So said the world; adding slyly that with wild Lady Grizel it might perchance be otherwise, should her more ardent and impetuous nature ever kindle his cold one into warmth. But she, though dreadfully wild and reckless, was ambitious, and would never be likely to do so silly a thing. She certainly flirted over-much with the handsome soldier, considering her solemn engagement to the vanished Duke. Yet, after all, was not his Grace of Hamilton hob-nobbing with Apollyon in a booth of Vanity Fair? Why should not his future duchess do the same?

During the course of this gossip of ours the tank below had been emptying itself, and the pump-room was full. The Princess had said a civil thing to every raddled countess, while the Prince of Wales yawned in their faces. Mr. Fox still trotted out

the hobby of Mr. Pitt, and laughed in his sleeve at the *naïveté* of that gentleman.

"Of course," Fox observed languidly, "every man has his price. Some are more expensive than others; that is all. Is it not fair, too, that each should be paid according to his value? Every peer——"

"For peers read place-hunters," interrupted Pitt hotly. "I vow the state of England makes me sick. The waste of public money is fearful. And think of the disgraceful purposes to which it is applied! Corruption saps the country to its core. This is the rotten branch of the constitution. It must be amputated, or the whole tree will perish."

"We must put up with our infirmities," Fox said quietly. "Amputation might mean death. It generally does."

"Blind, blind!" retorted the other. "We are despised among nations. Our flag is insulted on the seas. The people are crushed and mulcted of their hard-earned coin—for what? That my lord may comfortably enjoy his sinecure. But take care! We pass through a dangerous crisis. There is no telling what may come of it."

"Mr. Pitt, the raven!" laughed a young man who approached to take his glass. "Observe the beaklike nose and glittering eye and body clothed in black from top to toe. Most gloomy of birds, good-morning!"

"Do I know dis ugly fellow mit de Chinese eyes?" whispered the Princess to Lady Grizel.

"It is Mr. Wilkes," returned the Honourable Jack in an undertone. "The ugliest, wickedest, pleasantest young man in Bath. He was presented to your Highness at Mr. Nash's comfit-tea. Few can forget that strangely ugly face."

"I know now," rejoined the Princess, pursing up her lips. "He is de bosom friend of Monsieur Stone, de tutor, and a shocking rake."

"News, ladies all! glorious news!" cried Wilkes gaily.

"Hath his Grace of Newcastle done aught that's wise?" asked Pitt, smiling.

"You expect the impossible," retorted the other. "You know that the Prime Minister is a born fool. I have just spied a coach rumbling down the hill. It is covered with dust. The postilion wears tartan. Perhaps it is Charles Edward come to take us prisoners! And yet, not so, for it lurched over in the ruts at the bridge-foot, and a grave gentleman emerged, of finer presence than the Chevalier. He was invited to leave his coach with the postilion and walk into the town, but observed that an earl must enter a city as befits his rank. But I beg pardon. I interrupt a reading."

"The reading is over," said Lady Grizel. "An edifying one; for it shows little Prince George to have a tender heart."

“More likely that Prince George wept for shame because he cannot read,” remarked Stone, coming forward. “As her Royal Highness said, it is disgraceful? If I might have the sole direction of the boy——”

“Bravo, friend Stone!” whispered Wilkes to him. “That man’s fortune is made who moulds the character of a future sovereign. But see! Here comes your coadjutor—the broken-winded Bishop and his jackal—waddling like crows across the yard, emblems of sloth and indigestion.”

“Hold thy clatter, Stone!” shouted the Prince of Wales. “Thou knowest that an ass may not wear horse’s trappings!”

“De bells!” cried the Princess, to avert a storm. “Grizel, my loafe, go see oo’s gum!”

The fat Bishop of Norwich and his chaplain puffed up the pump-room steps and elbowed a passage towards the royal party, followed by bowing Mr. Nash and the new arrival. The buccaneer Bishop and his pet parson were very much alike; round, red, wheezy, with coarse mouths, tubercular noses, and huge cauliflower wigs. The parson’s back was always on the bend. He was always raising his eyes and dumpy hands to heaven as if to say, “Oh! what a witty man of God is this my patron!” And he was wise in his generation, for he owed all to this Bishop who picked him out of the Fleet one day, when that churchman reeled

drunken thitherwards. Not that his Grace was a mere roystering sot; far from it. For years he read prayers each morning in the Princess's ante-chamber while she dressed, and gained her respect once on a time by ceasing his orisons when she slammed the door.

"Go on!" she screamed, on that occasion.

"Madam," he answered, "my prayers may not be read through a keyhole."

"Gott im Himmel!" she retorted testily, "does the man wish to see me in my bath?"

Nevertheless, she accepted the rebuke and thought better of him ever after, obtaining for him the office of tutor to Prince George, and even hinting that possibly he might die at Lambeth. Aware of his own shortcomings in the way of learning, however, he left the care of the Prince entirely to Stone (who would gladly have had the lad all to himself), save in the presence of his parents, when he always made a point of lecturing his pupil after a fashion which exasperated the other tutor. Yet in the main, the two jogged along together well enough. For the Bishop knew Stone to be extremely clever, and leaned heavily on his colleague in the matter of book-lore.

"A good-morning to your Royal Highness," he panted with a low bow, which was imitated by his pet parson. "I am come to fetch my little Prince. Verily, it behoveth him to learn his articles of faith. Brother Stone will spare him to me for

half an hour. In tears! Heyday!" he continued, laying a grimy snuff-stained paw on the child's head. "There, there; don't cry. Go along with good Parson Ames, who will amuse him."

The boy looked up half sulkily.

"May she come too, my little wife?" he inquired, twining loving arms around the small beauty with black eyes.

"Your little wife, forsooth!" cried Lady Grizel, seizing the child's frock in mischief. "She stops with me."

The small beauty knitted her small brows fiercely, doubled her small fist, and blurted out:

"Save me, Georgy. I hate her, I hate her, I hate her!"

The two innocents set on Lady Grizel, and pummelled her with all their united strength till she was rescued by the Honourable Jack.

"What spiteful scorpions!" she cried, resettling her tumbled draperies. "I protest I must look hideous!"

"Lovelier than ever with that faint flush," whispered amorous Jack.

"Do let de childer alone," reproved the Princess of Wales. "You madgab do tease dem so! Go 'long mit Parson Ames as de gut Bishop says."

"A pretty pair," mused the Bishop. "His little wife indeed! It would be strange if a Lady Sarah Lennox came to be Queen of England!"

"Yes, a very pretty pair," Lady Gladys repeated abstractedly.

"Oh, ambitious Cinderella!" shrieked Lady Grizel in a peal of merriment. "Madam! I beg you to beware of your meek maid of honour. Still waters run deep. I vow she is more wicked than poor I. She'll tie the Heir of England to her little sister with bell, book, and candle, some night when we're all snoring. These quiet gazelle-eyed women are always the most dangerous."

"Madgab!" reproved her mistress.

"Ahem!" smirked ungainly Mr. Nash, removing his large white hat. He had been fidgeting for full five minutes in the background, which ill became the dignity of the King of Bath—on his own territory too—in his own pump-room where his word is law. "Your slave, ladies," he said, "your abject slave. Lady Grizel, you look as bright as though fresh-bathed with dew. Mr. Bellasis, your humble servant. That new peruke of yours is vastly engaging. Might I beg a pattern of it? Indeed, my taste is often called into play. Her Grace of Marlborough hath always done me the honour to employ my genius on her liveries."

"In all matters of taste Mr. Nash must be held sole arbiter," bowed the Honourable Jack, as he shook back his ruffles.

"You are too good," returned the King of Bath, with an elaborate inclination. "May I present to

your Royal Highnesses a treasure I have found ? A new jewel I have added to the crown of happy Bath ? This is the Earl of Bute, who hath but just arrived. A noble Scot, but not a Jacobite, who humbly lays his homage at your feet."

"Très beau, parole d'honneur," muttered the Princess audibly. "But dressed like a scarecrow. Has he brought mit 'im any news?"

In truth his lordship was dressed like a scarecrow. His hair was trimmed in accordance with a mode long dead. The gold twist about his waistcoat was the worse for wear. His coat was not stiffened with wire and buckram as it should have been. Mr. Nash remarked these defects with a critical eye, resolving to have them remedied at once. He observed with pleasure that my lord was a fine-looking man who would do honour to Bath ; that he was tall and solemn, and evidently proud of a shapely leg which he took care to exhibit to the best advantage.

"Glad to see your lordship," yawned the Prince of Wales. "You'll find Bath deuced dull. It is, Mr. Nash, in spite of your deprecating shrugs. I swear it is going to rain. Amuse us, Mr. Nash."

Mr. Nash frowned anxiously, interrogated the ceiling and the walls, and shook a cloud of perfumed powder from his full bottom.

"Sir, will you play pushpin?"

“Pushpin be d——d. No. The servant’s game. What is it? whist!”

“Whist be it!” cried Mr. Nash, beaming as though an important question of state policy had been decided. “There are tables in the inner room. Mr. Pitt, will you make one? No! your gout is bad. Mr. Fox, and perhaps the Earl of Bute—I? no. Your Highness must excuse me. The Chinese Fête is on my mind. I dream of it by night. To-night’s programme too; and a new dance to teach to some charming ladies. By the way, I claim your sword, Lord Bute; none wear swords at Bath. You see I am the established protector of innocence. Ahem! You have no idea, though, how hard it is to save the dear ladies from each other! You will be obliging enough, too, never again to wear boots in the pump-room. Thank you. And a guinea, please, for the bellringers who welcomed you.”

“Mr. Nash is a greater tyrant even than my royal father,” laughed the Prince of Wales; “and makes a pretty dishonest penny, too, as Master of the Ceremonies.”

And so Lord Bute played whist with their Royal Highnesses, while the maids of honour worked at their tambour in the outer room, exchanging titbits of scandal with the other gentlemen.



CHAPTER III.

A CRUEL SNARE.



N hour passed. The pump-room was deserted by all but our group of courtiers, for it behoved the ladies to dally awhile among the toy-shops, and taste a jelly or so at a chocolate-house before the midday promenade by winding Avon ; while as for the beaux, there was much for them yet to do in the way of salves, and unguents, and improvements upon nature, independent of the arduous labour of letter-writing, and gazette-reading, and political discussion at the taverns.

The maids of honour worked at their tambour, while mournful Mr. Pitt edified them with the unsatisfactory state of Europe. Wrapped in the theory of the Beautiful and Good, Mr. Pitt took special pleasure in airing his views to Lady Grizel, who, charmed by the music of his voice, was content to sit for hours listening to his description of the millen-

nium, of the good days coming, when his present disreputable Majesty should be gathered to his fathers; when corruption should be rooted out; when all men should be as honest and as true as was the speaker. Sometimes as she listened, she felt that she herself could almost become good. He took it for granted that she was so, and she was quite taken in for a moment, deeming that the severely lofty sentiments he uttered struck a re-echoing chord within her breast. She revered the young man, and looked on his single-mindedness with awe. Virtue of any sort was so rare in the world in which she moved—a world girt round by the slime of selfishness, jealousy, avarice, littleness of every kind. For an instant now and then she felt a feeble throb somewhere at the bottom of her heart, which told her that the germ was there, nipped, kept down by the frosts of those early grinding days; but still alive. Would it not be glorious to be as pure as ascetic Mr. Pitt! Then the throb ceased. No! She could not expect to be for ever young and beautiful. She must make hay while she could, feather her nest, bloom out as her Grace of Hamilton, join the train of the Mammon of Unrighteousness, and, come what might, stave off the possibility of a future like the past. But, after all, why not be a miracle of virtue as well as Duchess of Hamilton? The Duke was young, handsome, and *débonnaire*. That hobnobbing

with Apollyon would have opened his mind doubtless. He and she together would bask in the sun-rays of prosperity, abandon a profligate court, play my Lord and my Lady Bountiful to an army of retainers, and sink at last, deeply regretted, into an honoured grave. The picture was pretty. She felt that, away from temptation and lapped in luxury, she could play the part of Sainted Lady Bountiful vastly well. But then his Grace's conduct had been most strange. Oh! if he should dare to play with her pride, to humble her before the world, to make a fool of her! The bare idea of such a thing brought tears of rage welling to her eyes. A devil rose up within, and looked out of them. Under given circumstances she knew she could turn out a demon. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil! By a strong effort of will she choked back her tears, and gave her attention to Mr. Pitt's discourse, but it seemed a long way off, and not a little tiresome; so she gave herself up to reverie, marvelling at the absent Duke's singular conduct.

The patriot pursued his subject with unflagging energy, while Lady Grizel made believe to listen, and Mr. Stone smiled scornfully as on a Quixote. He felt the humbled condition of his country keenly. Each new insult from abroad was a stab in his vitals. He panted to lend his strong young hand to the trimming of the ship. He longed to make taut this rope, to tighten that knot, to grease this block, that

securely she might ride the waves. But no! his time was not yet come. Conscious of superior strength, he was yet compelled to sit watching with folded arms; for his Majesty detested, and the Prime Minister feared him, though the masses of the people were beginning to look up to him with expectation.

He thought of the rebel lords and their sad fate with generous pity—Kilmarnock, Balmerino, Lovat! victims of a forlorn hope—and pointed out to his auditors that if the faults of the Chevalier were glaring, so were those of his reigning Majesty. Having eased his mind and rounded his period, Mr. Pitt stalked away to occupy his daily seat in a certain coffee-house window, and in striding down the steps well-nigh upset a stout old lady, who, by the help of a crutch-cane, was struggling upwards to drink her morning glass. She was a comely old lady with natural white hair and a rich damask sacque embossed with flowers. By her side jingled a bunch of silver keys, and in her hand she held by a string a phthisicky dog of the pug kind, a caricature upon herself.

“That man is too good for his time,” observed young Wilkes. “He will never get on, for he is always running amuck against windmills. It was incautious of him, too, to speak so plainly about the rebel lords, for ’tis dangerous even to pity the Jacobites. The King is strangely ill-judged in his hatreds, though.”

Mr. Stone, the taciturn tutor of his young High-

ness, shrugged his shoulders and laughed a harsh laugh. Mr. Stone's temper was not good at the best; he had recently been put down by the Prince of Wales, whom he despised; and was ruffled by the narrow jangle of court gossip.

"The King! the King!" he said with an oath. "How sick to death am I of this dreary farce—this seeming to see a god in a mere ape! A trumpery little strutting Jackanapes with white eyebrows and a red face, and not the scrap of a virtue to his back! Royalty and wickedness are one, I think. And we must cringe, and crawl, and lick his shoe, and take his kicks, though we know him all the while for a tinselled disreputable cormorant!"

The two maids of honour looked up startled. The Bishop turned livid, as he glanced quickly at the whist-party, which was visible through an open door. But Stone's temper had got the better of his judgment, and he went on:

"Friend Wilkes, sit still. Truth sounds like lunacy in our circle of Falsehood. I tell you I am sick of daily insult and degradation. Good-morning, old Mrs. Hanmer. I pledge you in a glass of Bath-water. Pooh! I care not. *The Chevalier!* He wears at least the halo of unsuccess."

Stone, with flushed face, filled two goblets from the spring, tossed off one himself, and held out the other to the surprised old lady. But young Wilkes, intercepting it, dashed it to the ground.

“Man ! you are mad ?” he said. “Happily you are among friends, who will forget this nonsense. Into what straits do people’s tempers bring them ! That is not the way to war against the Georges. Why,” he continued with a sly smile, “if you chose to use it, what a weapon you have at hand ! Tutor to a future king ! Writer of virtues or of vices on a clean white slate. Come ; no doubt court leading-strings will chafe sometimes. We will go and stroll in the Orange Grove.”

The mask, raised for an instant, dropped over Stone’s features. He was the silent, calm, inscrutable tutor to his Highness once again. But the vision of the falcon hovering over the dovecote startled the birds below. Modest Lady Gladys tied on her hood in haste and retreated to her lodging. Lady Grizel, less precipitate, nodded to old Mrs. Hanmer, who was her aunt, arranged her chip hat to the best advantage, and sauntered down the steps towards the White Hart Inn to hear if there were any news of her brother’s coming. She hummed a tune as she went, and wondered whether Jasper would bring intelligence of the vanished Duke ; then reflected on Stone’s behaviour a moment since. The usually frozen tutor had of a sudden taken fire and spoken treason, which it behoved all present to forget at once. Did he mean what he said ? If so, how dangerous an occupant of a royal nest. But that was not likely. It was idly done, no doubt

under pressure of the Prince of Wales's rudeness. An ill-timed jest though, whilst the block yet reeked with the blood of the rebel lords! "What very unwise things sensible people do under stress of temper!" reflected the maid of honour. "I don't pretend to be wise. Dear old Jasper used to call me the child of impulse. But that tutor, who always seemed so grave and calculating! it is most odd."

The maid of honour tripped on her way; the Bishop (with thoughts of Lambeth) fled precipitately. The Honourable Jack and Mrs. Hanmer were left alone. The old lady was the first to find her voice.

"Well, oddsbodikins!" she ejaculated; "some folks never know when they are well off. Thank God I know my place, and pray for the Lord's anointed at morn and evensong. Some people worm themselves into a high post, then fling themselves forth in passion and break their necks."

The Honourable Jack seemed oppressed and nervous in the presence of Mrs. Hanmer and made a feint of retreating, but she circumvented his exit with an expression of reproach:

"Oh, Jack!" she said softly, "how like your poor dead father you look this morning. The same broad brow and downy cheek that worked my undoing all those years ago. And you look on me with the same indifference which shrivelled up my heart, though, like the silly slip of a girl I was, I loved him all the more for it."

The propriety of the Honourable Jack was disturbed by the aged dame's superfluous affection. Again he tried to escape, but could not.

"Jack!" she murmured tenderly, "let me not twit you for lack of courage; you who become your martial uniform so bravely. We are fellow-conspirators. For your dead father's sake, who—well, never mind—I have done for you what I would have done for no man living. Lord forgive me, I've done a grievous wrong to my own flesh and blood. Poor Grizel! Please Heaven that it should be for the best."

"I can't go on with it, there!" growled the Honourable Jack. "When you are present you persuade me as you choose, but when you are gone I perceive the fallacy of your arguments. Lady Grizel cares not two jots for me, nor I for her. That is, I really do not know. Let us drop the business."

"Fie on the silly boy!" gibed the old lady. "Must I carve his future for him in his own despite? Though really when I think of what might happen I am terrified. His Grace is a hopeless paragon of faithfulness. He hath writ to her by every courier these two years past, and yet—and yet," she continued softly, with a crafty lip-curl, "not one of his ardent epistles hath reached her hand. Her woman hath served us well. Deborah shall be rewarded, though I had much ado to bring her into the plot. The creature pretends to love her

mistress, and, till I clearly showed that by deceiving she was really serving her, declined to help our scheme. But while I've slaved for you, you have done nothing. I have sung your praises, vowed that you were wasted to a mere shadow for her, sworn (Lord forgive me!) that I heard sad tales of his Grace's backslidings; and I knew that she winced under my speech for all her impenetrable front. The siege hath continued over long. 'Tis time to storm the fortress. My vanity is tied to your success. You are bound to return to your regiment to-morrow. If you go without clinching the affair, you are not your father's son, and I throw up the cards."

Whilst listening to the wicked old woman, the Honourable Jack became a melancholy picture of irresolution. He tied and untied the tassels of his muff, and rueful puckers settled on his soft face. He felt that the ancient lady's plot was infamous, that his own starched ideas revolted against each word she uttered; but then, besides being prim, he was also weak, and the dame who had once been his father's mistress had an unaccountable way of getting the better of his scruples.

"Mrs. Hanmer," he said, with hesitation, "your interest in me is very good; yet I really cannot say at present whether I really love the Lady Grizel or the Lady Gladys."

The old lady lost patience and rapped her stick

upon the floor. These scruples annoyed her. Had she not lived a long life in the world, battenning on the offal whereon the nobles chose to feed? She had a scheme which should unite for their mutual advantage two persons in whom she was interested. That in the end both would be the gainers, she felt assured. Bless me! how obstinately people do fight against their happiness. Who should be the best judges of what is good for them if not their elders, who, if full of years, are also rich in manifold experience? For his father's sake she was resolved to make young Bellasis, and here was he fighting through pusillanimity against the future she prepared for him.

"Pooh!" she cried; "you prate like a fool. Will his Grace of Richmond give his daughter Gladys to a younger son whose sole fortune is his sword? Lord Bellasis, your brother, will do nothing for you. And quite right, too, for you will do nothing for yourself. I have explained to you till I am hoarse that you must marry my niece, the Lady Grizel, before the return of her betrothed. She half likes your handsome face: of that I am sure. If nothing is determined before you leave to join your regiment, who knows what may befall? This knot shall be tied ere you depart. Old Parson Ames, the Bishop's jackal, shall do the job. Long practice in the Fleet has inured him to such business, and he'll be quite pleased to keep his hand in.

Grizel is fretful and says sharp things. The iron must be struck while it is hot. She is writhing with suppressed rage at the Duke's apparent neglect. To-night, or never, must you be married to her. The secret shall be close kept till an auspicious moment. Meanwhile the maid of honour shall be taught to push your suit. To wit and beauty all is possible. A place shall be found for you through her influence. She hath the ear of the Princess of Wales, and if she willed it could even lead captive all the ministry. Your fortune shall be made for you by your wife; through the scheming of your father's withered love, old Hanmer."

"Your plot is a woman's plot, which doth not befit a gentleman," murmured the Honourable Jack as he bit his nails in an agony of vacillation. "She is marvellously fair! This deceit once done with, I vow I would be a fond husband to her. But then the Lady Gladys, with her serene moonlit loveliness! I feel like Mr. Gay's hero: 'How happy could I be with either!' Brilliancy of parts *versus* retiring perfection! But she must know some day about the suppressed letters, and what will she think of me then?"

The Honourable Jack had chanced on a twig to stay his rush downwards over the precipice; but the old woman tore it up by its roots.

"You are as pretty a fellow as any in the kingdom!" she whispered fondly. "The very genteelest

figure under arms. Your person and air have the noble wildness which conquers a female heart; Duke Hamilton is travelling still. In the order of things he will not return for six months at least. Between this and then what may not a young husband do with a young wife?" Then she added with a devilish leer: "My lord your brother hath no heir. Six months! A prospective mother will fight like a tigress for her lord! Go to, silly boy! Trust an old woman's knowledge of the world! See! yonder she stands under the archway of the Hart. How perfect is her profile, how faultless her bust! Deary me! I was once well-nigh as fair, yet I fell a victim to a libertine. Marry her, Jack. Then shalt thou save her from the pitfalls of the world."

The dame, as usual, gained her point. The Honourable Jack felt that it was his mission to wed my Lady Grizel. He looked on her surpassing loveliness and her fate was sealed, although her guardian angel was even then standing at her elbow in a square-cut brown coat and a flapped hat. Alas! even guardian angels are sometimes blind and selfish. They have affairs of moment to themselves, which occupy their thoughts and dull their vigilance. They should be content to look down from their cloud of observation intent only (through their telescope) on the troubles and dangers of those they have in charge. But they doff their celestial robes,

and, assuming for a time a human form, become engrossed and wearied with sorrows of their own. So was it with Lady Grizel's guardian angel. His face was stern and preoccupied as he talked earnestly to his sister, while he flicked his muddy boots with a stout riding-whip.

"Jasper out of prison!" muttered Mrs. Hanmer in an undertone. "Her watch-dog free! This is unfortunate. No matter; go, dear Jack, and brush your wedding suit. I will settle it all, for am I not your self-elected second mother?"

The young soldier went his way, bowing low to the beautiful maid of honour, who saw him not. She advanced slowly towards the pump-room, leaning on her stalwart brother's arm. Tears of bitter mortification stood half-dried upon her lashes. Her bosom heaved under her buckramed bodice. Mrs. Hanmer surveyed the symptoms of her malady as doth the leech his patient's, and retired to the inner room to cringe her duty to the royal whist-players.

"No letter! Still no letter!" muttered Lady Grizel under her breath. "What can he mean? You called at my lodging, Jasper, and at Hamilton House ere you left town? They have news of him, you say—that he is well and happy? Yet to his betrothed wife he vouchsafes not a word. His Grace remembers my past, Jasper, and deems me easy to win. Cophetua kindly deigns to raise the beggar-maid to share his throne, yet thinks her not

worth the wooing. A studied insult. I will hear no more of his Grace of Hamilton.

"Sister, do nothing rash," urged Jasper, stroking her firm white hand in his big brown one. But the girl was bitterly provoked, and, biting her lip, cried out :

"He forgets that my name is as ancient as his own. I have all the pride of the late Earl Gowering."

"Although our family is in truth illustrious," rejoined her brother sadly, "both you and I are equally adventurers. You with your pure lineage, I with my bend-sinister, have each to fight out our battle with the world. Your arms are youth and beauty : mine—well, endurance I suppose. And I *have* endured, till the fair daylight seemed smoked to red. Wrong, suffering, slight, persecution—these are my bedfellows ; how well I know them !"

A scowl settled upon Jasper's features as he brooded on his troubled life. With a deep sigh he resumed :

"Unfortunate myself, it seemed my duty to join the ranks of the unfortunate. Charles Edward is now a fugitive on foreign soil ; his adherents ruined, routed, undone for ever. Kilmarnock, Balmerino, Lovat ! those, indeed, hath fortune smiled upon, for their race is run. They are at rest !"

Lady Grizel looked earnestly in her brother's sombre face, and read hard lines there which were new to her.

“Poor Jasper!” she whispered; “you must have suffered much in prison; but now you are free again, and through my influence. Do nothing rash yourself, my brother! Come what may in our battle with the world, let us swear never to desert each other. Our dying father gave me in charge to you.”

Jasper bent down to kiss his sister’s brow.

“I am an outcast and a bastard,” he said tenderly, “and shall only bring you misery. Let me go my ways. The Princess is kind, and will protect you.”

“Then you desert me, Jasper! A woman cannot stand alone.”

“God forbid that I should desert you,” returned the gloomy young man; “but you are in safe keeping, and who shall tell where my bark may drift? A man may be buffeted till his manhood cries out, ‘Shame! Turn and rend these gibing idiots for mere vengeance’ sake!’ Are my mother’s errors mine that they should be dashed in my face? My poor mother, whom I never knew! Oh! his sin lies heavy at our father’s door, who ruined her and blasted my life before I came into the world. Why are we brought into the world without our own consent—into a vile, unequal world of sin and trouble? It is a cruel fate. Surely we shall not be punished for the crimes we may be driven to commit? That were but scant justice.”

As he walked up and down with feverish strides,

Jasper drew a medallion from his breast and pressed it to his lips.

“Here she is,” he said, “the woman our father wronged. How sweet, and soft, and innocent! What was the manner of her sudden end? Could he have murdered her? why? I dream sometimes of his own tragic death. Of how, being grievously wounded in a tavern brawl, he strove to speak or write, but could not, and died troubled. Was it about his will he was so uneasy, or did some secret press heavy on his soul?”

Lady Grizel looked at her brother in surprise, for he was become much more bitter than he used to be, but she said nothing. Only in moments of deep mental commotion did he ever mention his mother, and when he did so she was dumb, for unconsciously she shared with the persons of quality of her time an egregious love for many quarterings, and an unreasoning contempt for a bend-sinister. Whimsical paradox! That the fruit of intrigue should be branded as vile in an age wherein it was deemed ridiculous to be a faithful spouse. I mind me at the time of which I write it was modish to wear publicly the chains of the fashionable courtesan. I saw once a letter writ by his late Grace of Northumberland, who was not at all a rake, begging a notorious person to accept a row of brilliants in exchange for a nod when he passed her on the Mall. He proceeded to explain that he did not

really desire her acquaintance, but that it would ill beseem a peer of his quality to be eccentric, or out of the prevailing mode. Now this lord was, as it happened, absurdly devoted to his wife, and so he hit upon this ingenious method of creeping out of the difficulty.

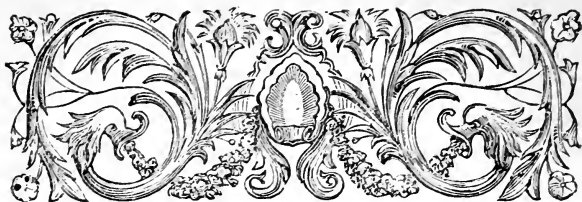
Lady Grizel, though she really loved her brother, gave him no comfort, but returned with rebellious vehemence to the contemplation of her private woes. Jasper felt, as he always did when betrayed by emotion into confidences, that there was a wall fixed between the two which neither might overpass. Truly he was a solitary waif and stray. What mattered it if ill should come to him? His sister was moving in her proper sphere, with wits enough for her own protection. 'Twere best for him to put forth his shalop on the dark seas, and drift, piloted by Fate, either to shipwreck or a haven. When fighting under the rebel flag, he had felt fierce delight in the music of the bullets. The road he was travelling then led straight to death or victory. The first (in accordance with the views held by many at the time) meant *rest*—absolute, eternal. The second, a name, won by his own valour. But fortune seemed to have selected this friendless man for her especial sport. The rebellion was suppressed, and he was neither dead nor victorious. His Chief was a fugitive. He was even rejected by the scaffold. For weary weeks he languished in a prison den unfit for

swine, with the small consolation of being a martyr. Now even this comfort was withdrawn. He was free once more—a social leper—to wander—whither?

Yet all who had cause to know him, respected Jasper. They were awed by the stern dignity of his subdued manner, and the deep print of early sorrow stamped with the blot upon his brow. He was wondrous independent too, seeking favours from no man on earth, a trait of character unusual in those who bore a like brand to his. He shrank from the society of persons of quality lest they should twit him with his birth; for once a thoughtless spark who had insulted him, turned in disdain from the sword which flew from its scabbard, declining to sully his own steel with a bastard's blood. But the lordling was near ending his days upon that spot. Jasper sprang at his throat like a tiger, and would have strangled him but for the interference of bystanders, who, to cool his just wrath, locked the bastard in the compter. With each fresh buffet Jasper seemed to grow more sensitive. It was no wonder then that he withdrew abruptly from the pump-room as Mrs. Hanmer hobbled forward from the distant whist-table; for that wicked old dame knew his weak points, and could play on them as easily as on the harpsichord. She disliked the young man because she fancied he was suspicious of her air of *bonhomie*, wherein the astute lady was wrong—for he was not.

With loud lamentations she clasped her arms around her dearest niece, cackling of Adam's gullibility and the fickleness of man; declaring that though she had received but now fresh tidings of his Grace's sins, she would rather die then and there than vex her darling with a recital of them. In the confusion of her sympathetic grief, however, she inadvertently let slip details concerning houris at Vienna, which sent the blood bubbling to Lady Grizel's cheek. Then cursing her own folly she begged her niece to forget what she had said, and refrain from weeping. But Lady Grizel was too incensed for tears. Her eyes were dry and glittering, the breath came short through her even teeth, as she looked round in dread of humiliation before strangers by reason of this loud and indiscreet affection. Seizing her aunt's arm, she said :

"Weep because a booby treats me as a toy? Not I! Come!" And dragging the old lady down the steps, and across the courtyard, she bore her to her lodging, whilst Lady Gladys, dreaming by her window, marvelled at the rapid exit of her fellow maid of honour.



CHAPTER IV.

PARSON AND HIGHWAYMAN.



IGHT had fallen upon Bath. The silver Avon wound her snake-like way under Pulteney Bridge over the weir, brawling onward to the sea, flecked by many a primrose light and gentian shadow. The adjacent Assembly-rooms, which rose from the trim bowling-green to meet the parapet wall of the North Parade, was gay with lamps and music. The river's breast was ploughed by many a ripple, perturbed by many a splash of oar, as wherry after wherry shot across the moonlit stream, bearing its noisy freight of revellers from Sydney Gardens to Mr. Nash's evening reception. The surrounding hills loomed black against a deep blue sky like some huge punch-bowl with a phosphorescent sediment. The city of pleasure was uproariously glad. Alley and court re-echoed with the mincing clink of wooden heels,

and the heavy measured tramp of chairmen swinging their burthens two or three abreast, that my Lady Joan and Mistress Anne might exchange budgets of scandal for the future delectation of her Royal Highness.

The old Abbey seemed to rise up out of a sea of fire, so many footmen were there leaning against its walls as they trimmed their links before seeking their accustomed taverns. Not that there was any cause, save a constant throat-dryness (chronic in some people) for their retiring under shelter. For the rainy morning had given place to a brilliant day and a clear night, wherein envious frost (pinched spiteful elf!) had, to the joy of all, been discomfited, for many months at least, in his annual series of pitched battles against summer. Perhaps the bevy of coxcomb serving-men were put to flight by those grey battered saints who had guarded the Abbey doors for centuries. What greater contrast than those grim silent ghosts, and the garrulous bedizened crew who lounged about the threshold! The servants were as glorious as golden shoulder-knots, and rouge, and lace, and monkey airs could make them. The saints looked ghastly, bloodless, awful; erect though shattered and bruised in a hand-to-hand tussle with Time—sturdy warriors, gashed by many an honourable scar. Sore had been the struggle, but yet they held their own. So did the stone angels on the worn Jacob's ladders, which still

stand on either side the porch ; brave doughty angels, who skip up and down with a perseverance deserving of all praise, as an example to the lieges to gaze heavenwards. Poor angels ! This sinful eighteenth century hath been almost too much for them, for, scared out of their propriety, they have sadly torn their skirts of stone in a hasty effort to hop out of reach of oaths and blasphemy.

Streams of light glinted through the long windows of the Assembly-rooms, casting weird shadows over the green sward. Many-coloured groups passed from the ferry to the ball-room stairs. The ball commenced, as it did each evening, punctually to a minute by the gold watch of the King of Bath. Mr. Nash opened the proceedings, as he always did, by solemnly leading out the Princess of Wales for a minuet. A pointed toe, a well-arched back, a shaking of costly ruffles, a twirl, a twist, then a deep inclination towards the ground. Nobody ever came near Mr. Nash in that last supreme reverence. Young and old marvelled at the beauty of it, and covertly practised his wondrous obeisance with locked doors. And it was well they took the precaution to secure privacy, for that bow was too transcendent for any of them. They invariably fell upon the floor, and soiled their garments with half-dried soot and beer, and were fain, when they themselves moved a minuet, to be content with the mere commonplace willowing of vertebrated mortals.

Triumphantly he led her Royal Highness to her seat again, then honoured lady after lady in turn according to rank, regardless of her hideousness ; which was affable in his Majesty of Bath, for in sooth there were many hideous painted Jezebels among his subjects. Tea was served at eight ; then romping country-dances supervened, and cards, and gossip, and spiteful lies, and malevolent abuse, and calumny for such as preferred those riper amusements. Happily we have nought to do with these just now, so the doors being closed, they may remain shut to us.

Two men leaned on the parapet of the North Parade, blinking at the line of hills, and the ghostly sycamores of Harrison's Walk, whose tops reached to the battlement whereon their elbows rested.

One of these men we have seen before. It is mulberry-visaged Parson Ames, the buccaneer Bishop's jackal. The other is his scapegrace son. He is tall and burly, with a rough-hewn face and a snub nose, whose coarseness is relieved by a pair of merry twinkling eyes. It is an ugly, reckless, jolly face. We may not respect its owner much ; yet, should he hold forth his leg of mutton palm, our own will spontaneously go down to meet it, however much caution may whisper " Beware ! " There is a mobility about his full moist lips which hint that he can troll forth many a lively song over his tankard, and that that tankard will be oft replenished ere the

company, of which he is the star, will be permitted to break up. There are men upon whose actions we look in cold blood with horror; whose conduct we deprecate; upon whom, in absence, we pass the sternest verdict; but in whose presence our resolves and better judgment seem to crumble into space. In what does the ascendancy consist? We know that you and I are immaculately pure, that we never stumbled in our lives, and are therefore fitted to sit in judgment on our fellows. Why then do we fall victims to these sinners? Must we accept the theory that evil is to reign paramount on earth? Or is the mysterious magnetic wave to be held responsible, concerning which Mesmer hath preached to us from France of late? Or is it merely the spell worked by animal spirits which (the world being a dull place) we accept with gratitude, forgetting that the gayest hearts are not unfrequently the blackest? For my part, I prefer the theory of the magnetic wave. How pleasant, when we are doing something delightfully wicked, to feel that we are irresponsible—puppets guided by the stronger will of some reprobate many miles away. Yet no. There is a certain charm about possibly impending punishment. If retribution comes on us, we cry “*Mea culpa!*” and swear to err no more. But if we escape a hairbreadth beyond the lash, how gleefully we caper; with what triumph we snap our fingers at the rod! I am sure that the criminal classes parti-

cipate with me in this. Sir John Fielding's thief-catchers add a tinge of spice unto their lives. Dear heart! Had I, who write for the behoof of my respectable grandchildren, not been born to a superior station, I vow I might possibly have been a footpad! just as this young Sim Ames once was. Well, well! Sim Ames is a fascinating fellow, as many an abigail knoweth to her bitter cost. If his gaiety is irresistible, his morals are abominable. Nor is this wonderful; for Parson Ames is his father who grovelled for years in the purlieu of the Fleet till the Bishop took a fancy to him. He wallowed to the verge of drowning in that maelstrom of human crime till his patron plucked him thence—for what? In order that he might be a tool in divine hands for the righting of a grievous wrong; in order that—but let us plod with as few side-winks as may be along the miry highway of this our chronicle.

Sim Ames, son of the Bishop's jackal, was attired in long boots, leathern breeches, a short jacket of faded tartan, a tawdry-laced hat and brown bob-wig, and right well the slovenly costume became his swaggering figure.

It was on a postilion's garb that his father looked with unconcealed disgust while his undutiful son laughed aloud, till the stone angels on the Abbey ladder skipped upwards in a fright more rapidly than ever.

“A ridotto-dress, father? No such thing,” he

said. "Masquerade follies are only fitted for the quality. If I wear a livery it is that of a peer of the realm, so that I cannot be arrested for debt at all events—which is more than you can say of your greasy cassock. What viler livery than that foul gaberdine? What are you but a servile pander to the vices of the great; a truckler to the house-steward for a bottle; an obsequious servant to my lady's madam, whose hand, with a benefice in it, you hope some day to win in exchange for daily slaving of dirty boots! Don't prate to me, father! The Earl of Bute, as I was telling you, visited the Fleet the other day to see some of the Pretender's chickens who are fellow-countrymen of his. Passing into the common-side he there saw me, and vowing that mine was the only lively visage on the premises, bought me of Bambridge, the prison-warden, as you might buy a slave, or monkey, or parrot. It was a nobleman's frolic by which I benefited, so I wear his livery for the present at least. We are forced in our chequered careers to embrace many trades 'twixt birth and the great long sleep. Your life will bear looking into quite as little as mine, despite your frippery of holiness. So let's cry quits."

"Alas! I am an afflicted parent cursed with a lewd son," groaned Parson Ames in the snuffling voice which clung to him through habit. "Verily my transgressions have been great, for, indeed,

driven by hunger, I was once a Fleet clergyman at twenty shillings a-week. But the Lord hath snatched me like a brand from the burning. I have left the crooked alleys of my youth for the broad paths of uprightness. My future——”

“Don’t preach!” sneered his son. “I caught you just now, remember, in close converse with Madam Deborah. She is your ‘future,’ I suppose? Madam Deborah, who is tirewoman to the Lady Grizel. A rare catch for a battered brandy-parson!”

“Verily she hath the genteel manners of good society,” smirked the parson, “and no wonder, for hath she not the ear of the favourite maid-of-honour? I hope some day she may come to be my madam, nor would it be a shaming of my cloth for——”

“Come. What are you hatching?” abruptly inquired his son.

Mr. Ames glanced up uneasily, and removing his wig mopped his bald pate reflectively. He had no intention of making a confidant of his hopeful offspring, whose past career did not inspire confidence, and so, like a skilful captain, he thought it best to carry fire and sword forthwith straight into the enemy’s camp.

“Sim! Sim!” he cried out, “beware of Tyburn! So reckless a youth will never die in bed. When tried for house-breaking did you not dare to appear in dock with your irons tied up in blue ribbons?”

Repent while there is time, as your sinful parent hath done !”

“Who brought me up in the shadow of the Fleet?” retorted Sim Ames. “Who led me when I could barely toddle beside your reeling step to the Twopenny Run of St. Giles’s? Who let me loiter in the prison-yard, to learn to patter flash, and pick a pocket? A rare place the common-side to prepare work for the craping cull. A rare hand old Bambridge at the killing of a conscience. Conscience! I have no conscience, thanks to *you*!” continued Sim, slapping his father lightly on the back. “No, nor heart neither; thanks to the villany of Bambridge. Though past five-and-twenty I never was in love, yet I never wear a vest but was made from a silken petticoat. All is fish to my net. A man dies but once. You bred me at the prison-gate; it was but natural that I should return thither as an occupant.”

“Oh Sim!” groaned the parson. “Want brought me down. I never robbed a man—I mean,” he added with a cough, “by violence. That my son should say I sent him to the gallows! Hunger drove me to the marriage trade, and the work I had to do drove me to drink. Remorse, Sim. Lower I sank and lower, clinging to straws that broke. I’ve tied many an incongruous thread and torn up many a register; but of all the knots I tied, one only lies heavy upon my heart. May that weight never be

lightened? May I never forget how the poor wreck of a thing crawled to me after long confinement under Bambridge, and taking the pittance I had in trust for her, departed without a plaint? What became of her? Dead, doubtless. I see her when I sleep and when I wake. First the father *and now the daughter!* But I swear it shall be for the last time. Am I not promised the hand of my lady's woman and preferment? The Bishop's memory needs jogging. One plunge more, then clean waters to the end."

He was murmuring huskily to himself under his breath, while his son scanned his bloodshot eyes.

"If this be it, I'm glad I have no conscience," he laughed. "Drops stand on your pate though the night be chill. I have been Jack of all trades in my time. Footpad, cutpurse, foister, nypher. But cheer up, father. I am going to turn gentleman soon, and a credit to you. A 'Collector on the Highway!' what do you think of that? With a velvet coat and silver-hilted sword to ruffle it at Ranelagh among the best."

"A highwayman!" exclaimed the parson.

"Why not?" returned Sim carelessly. "A man must live and a man must play. Till lately men found following Charles Edward more genteel than the road, but the block has put that trade out of fashion. Why! half the starved soldiers in his Majesty's Guards are forced to make pocket-money

on the footpad. The Prime Minister has his own split-farthing folly to thank for the danger of the roads. It was poor economy to turn half of each regiment loose upon the world, was it not? Hungry men are not particular. Yes! These are grand times for highwaymen, though gibbets with burthens do stand in avenues along Thames-bank."

"No, Sim! I'm an old sot," cried the parson vehemently, "but you shall not slide straight to hell if I can stop you. I have stopped short myself at the mouth of the pit."

"Have you? Can you suggest anything better, then?" asked Sim.

"My Lady Grizel shall beg a pair of colours for you."

"A soldier! To be starved and neglected! Thank you."

"Repent, Sim!" cried the parson. "Repent, my boy. Better days are in store. Do nothing foolish. Let us be virtuous, my son!"

"Then I am to wear my livery humbly till your reverence stumbles into fortune? Oho!" laughed the postilion with a pirouette, and such a shout as echoed among the hills. In turning he well-nigh knocked down two passing gentlemen.

"Peace! pestilent fellow!" exclaimed Mr. Stone sternly, who with Mr. Wilkes was moving to his lodgings on the North Parade. "Why! here's the Bishop's parson in secret conference with my Lord

Bute's servant. His lordship made much play with the Princess to-day. Our friend the parson trims his sails warily."

"Alas, sir!" returned Ames. "This is my ne'er-do-well son who is a thorn in the flesh unto me, more grievous than the devouring flea!"

The Abbey bells chimed eleven, and straightway the doors of the Assembly-rooms opened wide. Servants poured from adjacent taverns and blew their torches into flame. Chairmen bawled and hustled one another with cuffs into the kennel. The parson, muttering an excuse, slunk rapidly away. Stone bade his friend good-night and departed to his lodging, which overlooked the brawling river. A few moments more and the quality had departed to the upper town, the Assembly-rooms were locked and bolted, the avenues of Harrison's Walk slept in the tranquil moonlight.

Sim leaned his elbows on the parapet, whistling softly to himself as he gazed with listless eyes at the green expanse below, the darkling lines of trees like hearse-plumes, and the black waters beyond. Presently a footfall sounded on the flags. The postilion stood upright, and grunted with satisfaction in an undertone: "Jasper at last."

"Well! I am here," said Lady Grizel's brother, as though taking up the thread of a suspended conversation; "and my final answer is *yes*. I hesitated to follow the bent of my desires, for the

sake of the helpless girl who is my sister, but now we travel on different roads. She occupies a fitting place above my head, and I resign my trust."

"Well decided," cried Sim approvingly.

"The world's hand is against me," Jasper went on. "I am a social Cain. Oh, how I hate the world!"

"In a dangerous mood," laughed Sim. "Bambridge's brand is on you, though you have escaped him for the present. Is it not sad," he continued, apostrophising the stars, "that a worthy young gentleman with excellent parts should thus be goaded to despair? Nameless, penniless, at war with the universe by decree of fickle Fate! When I marked you clanking your irons in the Fleet, said I to myself, 'If society doth not intend to hang that man, she is preparing a scourge to whip herself withal.' And when you were freed on the same day as I, and when I found my old pals dead or shipped beyond the seas, I said, 'We two will fight the world together.' Never fear, man. You shall not disgrace your sister. Bless you! there are hosts of collectors on the sly who are much respected in society. Crape and a wig do that. Half the postboys on the road are in league with the gentry of our cloth. Many an ostler will loosen a nail in a traveller's horseshoe. And even say you are caught. Will not each young beauty mourn over your fate, and kiss her hand as you move Tyburnwards? Look at Maclean; what

a brave end was his. Countesses thronged to comfort his last hour; an earl's daughter stuck a posy in his breast, whilst another lady of title swore roundly that if they'd set him free she'd marry him."

"But he swung for all that."

"Ay. He leapt from the ladder, declaring that 'twas better to swing in chains in the sweet air than to rot among the worms below ground. You have no name to be darkened by the shadow of the Tree. See! here are two silver-mounted pops I bought of a gentleman's servant. My Lord Bute returns in three days to town. I'll retain my livery till then. After that—hey for the road! You shall ride hence to-night and stop us at the cross-roads by Edgware."

"What! Rob your benefactor?" cried Jasper aghast.

"Why not?" returned Sim calmly. "If not as a means to an end, of what use are such cattle? You will need a secret spot to rest in. Best make for Sot's Hole on Rosemary Mead, near Fulham; this pencilled map will guide you. Old Hannah, a madwoman, keeps the place; a rare old lunatic is Hannah, who will make you welcome if you talk to her of Bambridge. She cowers at his very name, for she lay under his care for years, and he drove the light of reason fairly out of her."

"Another victim of Bambridge? The curse of his existence darkens the day!"

“Yes; the ruffian left his mark upon her brain as on her body, which she will carry with her to the grave. Take the pops. But maybe they are not fine enough for my fastidious gentleman. Shall we add a coronet?”

Jasper winced, as he always did at any allusion to his misfortune. Taking the pistols, he stuck one into each flap-pocket of his vest, buttoned his coat securely over them and strode, without another word, into the darkness.



CHAPTER V.

BABBLE ABOUT MANY THINGS, CHIEFLY THE FLEET
PRISON.



NE of the most singular characteristics of this our period—one indeed which may well puzzle a later and perchance more virtuous age—is the anomalous position occupied by the “Collectors on the Highway.” Robbery hath flourished like unto a bay-tree in all times since Adam set the example of sin; but surely never until this time of the Georges did crime achieve recognition as a branch of the state-politic—an organised trade with heads to guide and hands to work it.

Deism and Fatalism, wafted across from France, permeated all branches of society. Human nature is wondrous meek in the face of what apparently must be; and, seeing no way to stop a growing evil, people came to look upon robbers as necessary

scourges, just as they might look upon a spider or a wasp. If a wasp merely annoys us by his buzzing instead of wounding us with his sting, we are quite thankful for his amiable forbearance. So was it with regard to robbers. If they contented themselves with demanding a purse, men resigned their money without much struggling, quite glad to have got off so easily. It was bad no doubt for a traveller to lose his guineas, but he might have been killed outright, or so seriously wounded as to come under a barber-surgeon's tender mercies which would have been a more cruel fate.

Sometimes the wasp did use his sting. Then sallied out his victim with a towel to crush the offending insect. Wasps, in the abstract, apparently must exist, and we put up with them, but we wage war to the death against any specially aggressive specimen. We pursue him with anger and our towel, vowing that we will have his life, but alas! more frequently than not he flies comfortably out of window, humming his little song. So with highwaymen and footpads. If they too sorely maltreated a wandering cit, then rose a mighty hue and cry. Sir John Fielding's myrmidons were set upon their track. If they eluded capture it was a misfortune; but if they were taken they were hung up in chains as an awful warning not to sting.

With the growth of the evil came a general mistrust. Who could be sure that the postilion

bobbing up and down in front upon the leader was an honest man? Why should he not be in league with a gentleman in a mask behind a hedge? Why not be, indeed, his brother, his father, or his son? Hence arose the strange condition of things, with cases of which our newspapers teem; I mean the robbing of a dozen people by a single individual. London burghers were ever brave enough, yet constantly a whole coachful of them turned out their pockets with the mildness of the proverbial lamb at the dreaded sound of "Stand and deliver!" How many rascals were there? How many rogues? Only one apparently. Yet who might tell how many more might lurk hard by, or even whether guard and coachman might not turn upon the passengers if they resisted? Self-preservation is a law of nature, you may argue. Why, then, did not all honest men unite to put down a common nuisance?

The Englishmen of this our period, if not miracles of morality, are at least sportsmen to the core. Reynard is an ill-smelling beast which doth damage to the henroost, but the hunting of him is rare fun. 'For the sake of sport let us put up with a tithe of his malice,' they said. Keep our foxes within bounds, but do not stamp out the breed. This feeling led to the establishment of the thief-catcher's trade, who pampered and fatted his thieves as a grazier fattens cattle for the market, surrendering a batch of his pets now and then for execution, when

popular opinion declared the race to be too numerous. The time of the Second George being notorious for its low standard of morals, it is not surprising that terrible abuses arose in this matter of thief-catching. The tracking down of innocent persons on trumped-up charges, and their hounding to Tyburn for a paltry reward, was a matter of every-day business. Cases there were, too, of parties being even inveigled to commit burglary that their tempters might obtain blood-money for their conviction.

People grew accustomed to this newly-expanding evil as to others in obedience to the favourite creed of fatality, which taught, amongst other things, that this our globe is badly organised, and that its inhabitants have a preposterous amount of tribulation to put up with. Such a doctrine led by natural steps to a dimming of the dread of death. When rich men make an open boast that it becomes them not to spell, and that the only fit objects in this life are drink and gambling, why should less fortunate lieges look on the world save as a base, unhealthy atmosphere, out of which it is good to be set free ? The debased condition of the clergy did much towards bringing their Church into contempt. The burning sarcasms of Voltaire thundered new ideas into men's hearts, which were only too ripe for the new seed.

Religion tottered on her throne. Men despised the drunken parsons who snuffled out their prayers ; and soon came to despise as well the doctrines

which they preached. Eternity? heaven or hell? Nonsense! A long dreamless sleep was the end of all; then why should men fear death? Custom, moreover, had already half deprived it of its terrors, for rows of gibbets lined Thames-bank and the country roads, and stood even on the public squares.

King George II. set a bad example to his aristocracy, which they followed with edifying loyalty. Venality reigned supreme. Each man had his price. Ministers took and gave bribes openly. The King had an itching palm. The Prince of Wales cheated at cards without attempt at concealment. The gentlemen of the road not unnaturally said:

“We hold no looser code of morals than that of the *noblesse*, whose pockets we lighten. Why should magistrates be more incorruptible than ministers? If we have money we will buy our freedom; if not, a man dies but once, then all is over. We will skip lightly from the ladder when our hour comes.”

The disgraceful conduct of his Majesty, and, through his leading, of the nobles, is chiefly answerable for the low moral tone which yet pervades the period. My ladies are fair, but also frail. My lords as a mass are illiterate, a prey to unbridled passions, devoted to drink and gambling. The commonalty which daily beholds its princes gloating over the bear-fights at Hockley and the cruelties of the cockpit, cheek by jowl with notorious reprobates and courtesans, learns, naturally enough, to look

leniently on the behaviour of such characters. The low-bred Englishman loves pluck by instinct. He hath learned through the behaviour of his betters to become dangerously intimate with thieves, joking with them on their road to Tyburn, and in this can in nowise be blamed, considering that countesses did much the same. It was modish, till good Queen Charlotte abruptly changed the fashion, for ladies of quality to spend hours of morbid excitement among the Bow Street malefactors, whilst their footmen and chairmen consorted with thieves' spawn in the street without the court. Lady Caroline Petersham publicly professed herself vastly enamoured of Maclean, the highwayman. Miss Ashe flirted and ogled in view of all the people with Sixteen-stringed Jack. My Lady Colqhoun begged to be permitted to embrace that most notorious of murderers, George Price.

It is not surprising that, situated as he was, Jasper should have decided to take to the road. Many of his compeers did likewise. There is between the purely honest and the dishonest classes (taking them broadly, for in sooth Mr. Pitt is well-nigh the only really honest man among them !) a debatable land occupied by a third class which consists of indigent branches of good families, who, under the old *régime*, would have helped to swell the retinues of heads of houses.

Consequent on the troubles connected with the succession, the higher nobility found it necessary to

abandon their feudal hangers-on ; and so were cast upon the town a host of idle people with good names and empty pockets, who were bound by nature to fill their stomachs somehow. No blue-blooded gentleman may, unfortunately, adopt a trade. How, then, could these hapless persons fill their maws without taxing the purses of the wealthy ? They belonged, as it were, to both extremes of the social scale—were the connecting link between the two—spending one day arm-in-arm with a duke, the next in a night-cellar ; were tossed backwards and forwards, teaching to each class the faults of the other ; and yet were looked upon with a certain amount of respect by the cits, who still maintained an involuntary loyal admiration for persons of quality.

Jasper came of a good stock, and lived on the lower ledge of the debatable land. He could not be expected to shrink, for moral reasons, from the contemplation of a life deemed convenient by men whose blood was tainted by no bend-sinister. There was a romance about it too which was constantly being fanned by the sentimental folly of Miss Ashe and others. His original texture was far finer than that of his compeers, who were merely urged to embrace the desperate life through vulgar greed, whilst he had stronger, deeper motives. So long as his sister remained on his hands, the weight of the charge supplied the steadiness which was want-

ing in his character. He would keep straight for her, because without him she would be quite alone. Then came her flight to higher spheres. Freed from all responsibility to others, he started forth to carve himself a name, and straightway burst upon his head a cataract of trouble which culminated in his consignment to the care of Bambridge. The name of Bambridge, warden of the Fleet prison, was one before whose terror hundreds of miserable wretches crouched and trembled, for in Bambridge were united the extreme of fiendish cruelty for its own sake with an unlimited power of exercising his ruling passion. Many a devilish ruffian among us lacks opportunity (by merciful decree of Heaven) for the gratification of his malice. But the angels were dozing when Bambridge's career was fixed, for, as chief-officer of one of London's largest criminal establishments, he had uncontrolled power over the lives of those within its walls.

At a time when more than usually impecunious ministers were prepared to sell anything, from the regalia to the stars upon their breasts, it occurred to one Huggins, who was a capitalist, that money might judiciously be wrung even from poor prisoners. Animated by this ingenious idea, he obtained for £5000 a patent for his own and his son's life, whereby the Fleet prison became practically, for that length of time, his exclusive property. After a lapse of years, he sold his possession to one Bambridge, who

carefully selected a staff of gaolers and commenced a system of terrorism without parallel in history. Knowing that in the then condition of his country gold was the one pass-key, he boldly set the laws of that country at defiance. He kidnapped men and women, shut them up and tortured them at his own pleasure, set them at liberty for a fee, or drove them stark mad with anguish. He kept no books, or so much even as an authentic list of the creatures under his care. Sometimes men were brought in too drunk to hiccup out their names, too poor to buy consideration ; they were tossed into the common side, where they rotted forgotten, till they died. Sometimes a thief-catcher would require a victim or two to stifle a hue and cry. He could purchase as many as he chose from Bambridge. What their crimes had really been, or whether they were criminals at all, mattered not. The warden and his myrmidons were prepared for any lengths ; and so well did he understand the refinements of his art that his victims could be reduced at will to every varied phase of lunacy. Those who were not already idiots could be brought so low as to swear anything—their guerdon the freedom of the grave. Casual offenders were shut up with hardened desperadoes. The untried were mingled with condemned felons. Old and young, sick and whole, clean and filthy, sane men and raving maniacs, all were penned according to his fancy in the common side, there to

remain till death set them free or till friends sent money for the payment of heavy fees. The warden was miserly as well as cruel. Sometimes the freak took him to declare the place was full, and so to refuse prisoners committed by the law. Then was he told with threats that he must take them, and from these threats was evolved a sublime idea.

It is manifest, that unless piled in heaps, no one building can contain more than a given number of human bodies. Such an axiom must be evident even to the most dull-witted of magistrates. Now this worthy warden was so anxious to oblige his superiors that he was prepared to make a sacrifice to please them. He would even buy the privilege of "the Rules." The bargain was struck, and he obtained the right of permitting such as could pay heavily to live on parole in houses adjacent to the prison. Both sides of Ludgate Hill, both sides of Fleet Lane, were within "the Rules." But genius is ever budding into blossoms. The warden's conception was not yet complete. A salutary terror must be instilled into well-to-do prisoners at the moment of their arrival within the Rules. To this end the warden established his favourite tipstaff (a one-eyed murderous-looking wretch called Corbett) in an eating-house over against the prison-gate, to which shambling abode all who had money were in the first instance to be brought. Here this great man kept a supply of beings suffering from loath-

some and catching diseases—virulent smallpox, typhus, with a sprinkling of the leprous and the plague-stricken. Along with these he threatened to lodge his new-found victim—ay, and did so, too, till in horror he paid so much as he could scrape for the privilege of the Rules, or even for admittance to the common prison. Upon the smallest sign of insubordination, the miserable creature was threatened with a return to Corbett's, or, if his money was quite spent and he dared to grumble, he was ironed and cast into the Strong-room along with the dead, who lay there many days pending tardy burial. Under such treatment the death-roll was not a short one. Gaol-fever was rampant. Some died of broken limbs and wounds caused by ill-fitting irons. Some sank through want of food. Some in unbearable agony dashed out their brains against the stones. Once—and only once—one of Cambridge's victims broke loose with wit sufficient to cry out that London had a hell in its very midst. But the officers of justice were too closely entangled with their warden as regarded their private affairs to be aught but purblind. Many of them owed him large sums of money. Out on the pestilent prisoner for babbling! A superficial inquiry was made. Prisoners were produced who, fascinated by their master's terrible eye, swore with tears (poor shattered wretches!) that they loved him. The escaped victim was returned to whence he came, and never more com-

plained, for he speedily succumbed under fresh horrible refinements of our warden's genius. The prisoners accepted their fate, railing on a scandalous world, and longed for death. Their attitude was but another phase of the doctrine of the Inevitable which so strongly tinges the period. Knowing that nothing but a rebellion could upset their reign, the tipstiffs went all lengths. They stole the pence thrown by the compassionate into the prisoners' box under the very noses of the wretched debtors, and having got pleasantly drunk thereon, inflicted playful chastisement because their victims dared to whine. A man named Hogg, who had obtained his freedom, returned in a silken suit to speak to one of his late comrades. Bambridge took a fancy to the suit, so Hogg departed thence no more, but shivered in rags on the common side till sickness sent him to a better place.

If there was a common side there was of course a superior one, wherein rooms might be engaged and furniture hired for about fifty times their value. Here, or in the airy houses in the Rules, visitors and persons of quality saw the prisoners in whom they had an interest. Here Lady Caroline Petersham wept with Maclean. Here Lord Bute visited the rebel lords, his countrymen. They saw little of the horrors of the common side, for they were as little disposed to affront gaol-fever as the warden was to call attention to his instruments of torture.

Now when the defeated rebel flood flowed into the great London prison, the officers were drafted at once into the Rules, while the poor soldiers were crammed into the common quarter, rendering that place of torment even less endurable than heretofore. For the most part penniless Scotchmen from beyond the Tweed, the latter had scant mercy to expect at the hands of Bambridge. The more lucky were hanged at once by dozens; the rest, less fortunate, perished of starvation and lingering disease in the wards. Jasper, with the ill-fortune which pursued him relentlessly, found himself under the care of Bambridge, who, to his surprise, singled him out for reasons of his own as a special object for his spite. If foul work had to be done, Jasper was told off to do it. He wore the iron skull-cap with nobs to press the eyeballs, the spiked collar, the thumb-screw.

The shires broke the skin upon his legs. In his indignation he cried, that by England's laws no prisoner may be tortured; to which Bambridge replied:

"Not so. By law the *peine forte et dure* may still be employed, and if one torture why not another?" Then he added with his satanic smile: "At all events you shall be tortured, and I will answer for it after." In a moment of good-humour he admitted to his prisoner that it was his deliberate intention to torture him to death; for that many years ago he had honoured his (Jasper's) mother with his love, who had dared to scorn and to repulse him. "But

I punished her insolence," he added exultingly, "as I intend for her sake to punish yours." Observing the young man's astonishment that this gaoler should know aught of his mother, and his eagerness to learn something which might later prove a clue to more, the warden obstinately closed his lips, declining to speak of her again, and Jasper felt that this man knew the secret of his life—of his mother's dark career and dreadful fate.

"If ever I escape," he swore to himself, "I'll wring the secret from that brute and return on him fourfold the suffering he hath caused us two to suffer."

Weeks of anguish passed over his head. The warden was true to his word, and in his poignant pain he thought no more of his mother save to pray for a place in her nameless grave. But he did not die. Bambridge had no intention that his especial favourite should escape too easily; so, thinking he might have gone too far, he connived at the kindness of a fellow-prisoner who, struck by the dumb endurance of the man, tried in his poor way to soften his lot. Sim Ames was only a vulgar malefactor locked up for petty pilfering. His light-heartedness endeared him to all. He did little services for the tipstiffs; by degrees he came to be let out upon parole to fetch and carry for the wealthier prisoners. He was as brave as a lion, too; could bear pain without a tremor; there was

no satisfaction in torturing him. But what was more to the purpose, he learned to make himself useful. Out of the few pence he managed to accumulate he bought small comforts for Jasper, and this pair, so dissimilar, became fast friends. Jasper's better nature was not shocked at Sim's natural bent for crime. On the contrary, he revelled in it, for the unwarrantable blows of fate bred in his haughty spirit a fierce hatred of injustice, which found vent in a burning desire to war against so ill-balanced a world. Had not society persistently illused him? Why then should he not retaliate?

By a coincidence it came about that the twain regained their liberty on the same day, and found themselves both travelling in the same direction—to the Bath; and it occurred to Sim to propose a partnership. We long oftentimes to do a thing when it is impossible, from which we shrink if the barrier comes to be removed. Jasper shrank from the proposal for his sister's sake, and demanded time to think it over. Reflection brought a bitter remembrance of his mother's fate, so singularly mixed up with Bambridge (who had not dared resist the special order of the Prince of Wales to set his cherished victim free). He found his sister apparently secure from the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, and so—he deliberately buttoned his coat over Sim's pistols, and strode off to commence in earnest a war to the death against society.



CHAPTER VI.

WILL LADY GRIZEL FALL INTO THE SNARE ?



R. STONE, the dark inscrutable tutor to his Highness, was preparing himself for rest. He was a singular-looking man, who seemed handsome till he smiled. His features were good; his skin of a rich olive; but when anything excited him to merriment you became aware of pointed irregular canine teeth like tusks which shone unpleasantly as though polished by much flesh-tearing. His eyes, too, when he laughed remained joyless; so that his face, when he desired to be most pleasing, looked as unsympathetic as a fire-grate whose ashes are wan and cold. His manners were irreproachable even in a critical age, his voice low and sweet, his dress scrupulously cared for. There was nothing to be brought against him except teeth and eyes, and sure 'tis hard to condemn a man for nature's sportiveness. So the repulsion

which people felt upon first making his acquaintance usually vanished in a day or two, making place for a feeling of self-reproach in that they had been beguiled by false appearances to misjudge so good a man.

Mr. Stone was on the whole in a good humour, though he already blamed himself for flying in the face of prudence in the matter of that health-drinking. He never cared a farthing for the Chevalier, and being ambitious was little likely to tie himself to a fallen cause. That any one should have taken him to be in earnest was of course out of the question. What really vexed him was that his temper should still be so undisciplined. Those who inhabit palaces must expect kicks. The Prince of Wales had by right of his rank dubbed him an ass in public. It was extremely ill-bred of the Prince of Wales, and a wise man would have contented himself with branding his master as a cur and a fool in his inmost heart. Young Mr. Wilkes, most genial of libertines, had soundly rated him for his folly, and he had cried "*Peccavi.*" Then the evening was passed right merrily, Wilkes pouring forth his inexhaustible fund of anecdote with brilliant humour, and the gentlemen at the tavern saw a good deal of Mr. Stone's tusks over their bottle.

He hung his wig on its block, removed the patches from the corners of his mouth, replaced

them in a japanned box, and nodded pleasantly to his reflection in the glass. Then he walked about his chamber in a long brocaded dressing-gown, and hummed a satisfied little tune as with hands behind his back he considered his position.

“Patience!” he said to himself. “Be patient and thou shalt establish a dominion over thy pupil. Wilkes was right when he remarked that that man’s fortune ’s made who hath the moulding of a future King’s character. Cunning dog! As sharp as a needle is young Wilkes, but over-vicious. He shall be reformed; for even in this barefaced time it becomes us to wear our sheep’s-clothing decently. The Bishop relies on thee, Andrew Stone; Lord Harcourt, chief governor, is a bit of buckram; the Princess of Wales is to be won—the poor thing is longing for a peg to hang her heart upon. Little George is a goose. Pity his mamma maketh such a fool of him. No matter! Andrew Stone shall pull the wires, and the whole set of naughty, wicked, absurd puppets shall dance unto his piping. What of my Lord Bute, the new Scottish scarecrow? Her Royal Highness evidently admired that shapely leg of his as much as he doth himself. A fine man and pompous, therefore of little wit; a huge organism of the lower sort like a stupid whale or elephant. A born courtier though. With what consummate breeding he failed to observe the Prince of Wales pilfering his whist winnings! He aspires to favour

with the Princess, so his Grace of Newcastle, the Prime Minister, must be told of this; though he is evidently too much eaten up with vanity to be dangerous. No more dangerous than is discontented Pitt—the sable Quixote !”

As he rustled to and fro in his dressing-gown, Mr. Stone’s half smile was replaced by a vexed frown.

“That too beautiful maid-of-honour — what of her ? Instinct says she hates me, and that I should fear her. There is something menacing in the bold outlook of her sapphire eye through the thicket of its lashes, something too masculine in the firm bigness of her finely-formed white hand. A masculine woman is better as a friend than as an enemy, for she may be driven to employ the weapons of both sexes; in which case her merely male foe would be surely worsted in a battle. An enigma ! Doth she really love the Princess, or is she acting ? Is her wild giddiness assumed ? What a power such fiery beauty might become should the whim seize her to toy with politics ! No fear of that. Cards and their toilet occupy our ladies nowadays. A carding woman is no better than Toby the wise dog, and yet—and yet—I should sleep easier if I could understand this lovely riddle.”

Having larded his face with perfumed unguent for the night, and settled his laced nightcap, the tutor attuned his mind to sleep by turning to more

pleasing food for thought than Lady Grizel's firm large white hand with trumps in it. He laughed aloud at Wilkes's latest sally, and flinging wide his casement looked on the flowing river. He marked the parson's son in his shabby livery still leaning on the parapet, as he had seen him half an hour before. He saw him rouse himself with a shake and saunter away. His eye lingered on the pearly walls of the ancient Abbey, on the black mass of the deserted Assembly-rooms, on the shimmering Green, and travelled across the water to Sydney Gardens and the wooded bowl of hills. How still lay nature under the moonbeams! He fancied he could hear the frogs embracing among the weeds—coy Miss Frog bidding Master Frog demand her hand of her mamma. Not a soul was stirring, for gambling fashion lived in the upper town. The old custom of the *couvre-feu* might still have been in vogue, for no lights were visible save those shining from above. Yes! one light was twinkling through the trees at the end of Harrison's Walk. Strange! For there was no dwelling there except the Pierrepont Chapel—last bed-place of departed Pierreponts. Was it a corpse-candle or some dishonest knave rifling the coffins of that ancient family? As he looked down from his eyrie on Avonbank, striving to pierce the shadow, Mr. Stone seemed to perceive figures moving to and fro. Perhaps a duel by torchlight. Disinclined for slumber, Stone resolved to investigate

the mystery. Hastily he assumed some clothing, and nightcapped as he was stole downstairs, across the parade, down the steps leading to the bowling-green, over the grassy space into the Sycamore Walk, where, secured from detection by the obscurity, he paused to recover breath. No tinkle of crossed swords—what could the flicker mean? Presently a hurrying woman ran against him, and with a subdued cry endeavoured to escape. Seizing her wrist he dragged her to the light.

“Mrs. Deborah!” he ejaculated in surprise. “What game of hide-and-seek is this? An assignation at your time of life! Fie for shame! I’ll tell my Lady Grizel of it to-morrow morning.”

“Mr. Stone!” murmured the abigail, evidently distressed. Then, after a pause of hesitation, she cried in tragic accents of unnecessary loudness: “Oh, alack-a-day! you could not tell on a poor woman. I might ask what you do here in a night-cap too? What would Mr. Nash say to such indecorum? You seek your chamber, and I’ll seek mine.”

“Speak lower! I’ll be sworn you are here to meet that sodden old rascal Ames. You tirewomen will swallow much to become parsons’ madames. I saw him hovering around not half an hour ago.”

Mrs. Deborah started and looked nervously behind her. The light still flickered in the distance, sway-

ing up and down. She burst into a torrent of shrill lamentation.

“What if I have looked up to dear Parson Ames, is there crime in that? It is ill prying into other folks concerns.”

The light was moving nearer.

“Hold your bawling. What is passing? I will know.”

“Well then, I’ve just been married,” cried Mrs. Deborah. “How cruel to force a body to blush. Good Mr. Ames, whom I am to honour and obey, wished it to be private, so I did as I was bid. Now you know all, so get you gone.”

Mrs. Deborah was evidently much moved by the event, for she was all of a twitter from excitement. Both were startled by a groan close beside them and a rustle of skirts. A female figure tottered past, whose mask fell at their feet as she groped by with outstretched fingers. A ray trickling through sparsely intersecting branches revealed the pale tear-stained features of the Lady Gladys.

“What have I seen!” she moaned; “what have I seen!” then hurried across the bowling-green towards the Abbey.

Stone and Mrs. Deborah stared at each other open-mouthed.

“So Lady Gladys stole down here to see you married and is jealous of the mulberry-visaged parson? A likely story!” sneered the tutor.

“As I hope for heaven I knew not of her presence,” stammered the waiting-woman. “’Tis a bad business.”

She evidently spoke truth this time, for her face was a picture of bewilderment. The light was moving nearer. Deborah’s cackle burst forth afresh, but Stone, with a curse, placed his hand before her mouth.

“Get you gone ! oh, get you gone !” cried Deborah, disengaging herself. “Beware of learning secrets that are not your own, lest your curiosity fall back some day in buffets on your head. Lady Gladys a secret witness too ! Peradventure shall evil come of this night’s work. Would I had never soiled my hands with it.”

“Hush, jay ! Hold thy peace !” muttered the other, pulling her backwards behind a tree. He was but just in time. Two figures moved past within a few paces hand in hand out into the broad moonlight, followed by another leaning on a crutch.

“Lady Grizel and Mr. Bellasis or their ghosts !” murmured the tutor, thunderstruck. “A secret indeed !”

Lady Grizel looked like a beauteous vision as she seemed to float in a silvery radiance. Her eyes with distended pupils stared straight before without sight in them. She moved as one in sleep. Her teeth were tightly set, her nostrils dilated : her breast heaved as the handsome young husband

alongside guided her steps. He seemed as troubled as she, for his lip quivered and he glanced uneasily from right to left.

The newly-wedded pair passed on to commence their lives afresh—away into the sheen of the moonbeams under the starry firmament. Not a cloud was visible, not a shadow now upon their path. Was this a fair omen for the future, or did the crippled old woman's presence, tottering behind, seem a warning as of danger following? Deborah broke away from Stone with an earnest entreaty that he would respect a secret surprised by chance, and sped after her mistress.

"Lady Grizel married!" ejaculated Stone, recovering from his astonishment. "The key of the enemy's citadel in my grasp! This is more than chance. And simple Lady Gladys broken-hearted. What can these women see in the prim young popinjay? What will his Grace of Hamilton say? She must be mad. Who tied this precious knot? The Bishop's jackal, or may I perish! They'll repent to-morrow and want to burn the register. No, no! not without my permission. Who goes there?—the waddling wicked crow! Hist—Parson Ames! 'Tis your old friend Stone."

The parson had just extinguished a candle and was pulling it out of his hat, where it had been stuck that he might read the service by its sputter. He looked up and made a movement as though to

escape, then, thinking better of it, approached timidly, for Ames was afraid of the tutor's growing credit with their Highnesses, and shared the common distrust of his dark countenance and joyless eyes.

"A pretty wedding. What will the Princess think of it when I tell her?" said Stone abruptly.

"A man must make a nest for his old age," Ames suggested humbly; "specially with a ne'er-do-well son who is no comfort. I would not do the job unless highly paid, for my conscience revolted against such a piece of work. I hold a promise of the parsonage in the upper town, and Madam Deborah hath said she'll be my wife. May my lady's marriage turn out better than my Lord Gowering's did, or Heaven help my soul! For indeed his lordship was a mighty rake, and the poor thing much below him in birth. Now the Honourable Mr. Bellasis is my lady's equal, with quite the noble air. Gratitude for favours will place me at her command. If she repents the job——"

"Not so fast," interrupted Stone sternly. "How stands the register?"

"Noted in my memorandum-book as usual," returned the parson, surprised. "See; no, that was Newsam's, the scurvy rascal who ran away with the certificate, leaving a pint of wine unpaid. I mind me I had a noise of four hours for my money, nor shall forget his vile usage as an example of the same. Here it is. No! that was the man who said

he was a weaver of Bandy-leg Walk, in the Borough. His lady, I remember, wore fine diamond earrings and a black velvet hat, which I thought strange. He was but half married, for he would pay no more than three-and-sixpence, and tried to steal the ring, because the lady changed her mind during the ceremony."

"Your old Fleet-book?"

"Ay, which I shall leave to Madam Deborah when I die as a rich legacy. Some of its pages are as good as bank-bills. There are notes here concerning persons in high places who would buy the sullied scraps of paper with ten times the gold to cover them should a whim take them to marry in their station. A rich treasure. Waking it never leaves me, and sleeps under my pillow at night."

"The Lady Grizel, hath she a copy of her lines?"

"Not yet. For her aunt says she will have a neat copy in a book to be bought on purpose, which she will keep under lock and key in her own scrutoire. There is no regular book here, for that chapel is private property. Doubtless she'll pay me well for this my own note. Then shall it be reduced to ashes at her own will and pleasure."

"That must not be," said peremptory Stone. The parson looked up quickly, then bowed with lowered eyes. "I will buy that note of you."

"I could not do it," murmured Ames after scratching his pate. "I did the job despite my

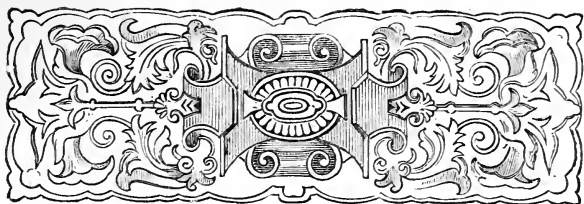
conscience, to provide for my future ease. My lady procures my parsonage and gives me her maid, who loves her. If in the future they asked me for the note and it were not forthcoming, my lady's wrath would fall on me, and my wife would make my life a purgatory."

"There is truth in the objection," acquiesced Stone. "Moreover it will be better in your hands. But take this warning. Part with your twin eyes sooner than that paper. Keep that register as one of the most priceless. Never sell it to Mrs. Hanmer. If I want it some day I swear to pay your own price. But if you dare to think of disobedience I will tell all to the Duke of Newcastle, my patron. Your preferment shall be wrested from you by me instead of by Lady Grizel; your note-book shall be burnt and you turned out a beggar. Threats I know will move you more than promises. Now get to bed and know my word is sacred."

Turning on his heel, he left the parson much perturbed in mind. His head was meekly bowed, his fat hands were crossed submissively over his paunch, but a cunning twitch lurked about his lips. Gratitude for prospective plenty tied him to Lady Grizel, but he had no desire to rouse the dark tutor's enmity. By faithfulness to the maid of honour he hoped to atone for his part in a dark affair connected with her father's early life. He genuinely desired to reform. Out of sheer indolence he yearned to

escape from the mud which had well-nigh choked him. How should he make certain of a peaceful future? Was he to act honestly by Lady Grizel and hoodwink Stone, or be true to Stone and betray the maid of honour? Either party could make his life a burthen.

Threatened by two opposite dangers, a weak man oftentimes tries to save himself by compromise, and so falls a victim to both combined. For the present it would be well to cling to the register. Which would it be safest to deceive? Either or both? The question was a delicate one, and needed consideration.



CHAPTER VII.

THE SHADOW DRAWETH NIGH.



HE Lady Grizel entertained at breakfast the Royal Family and a select circle of friends.

A genial morning had followed the starlit night, so the blithe maid of honour bade Mrs. Deborah to spread the meal in the open air, despite that lady's outcry that 'twas gruesome to eat among the bones of the defunct. And, indeed, it was a strange whim; but then all that Lady Grizel did was strange. She was accustomed to abide in a small lodging over against the West Gate, near Hetling House, where lived her royal mistress. Her apartment formed one side of a tiny square whose centre was a disused graveyard, made comely by the veiling of many a creeping plant, and there, in a bower of marigolds, sweetwilliams, primroses, and jonquils, she (the fairest flower of

all) was wont to while away her leisure time at Bath, resting her book or tambour, for a table, on some crumbling memorial slab—the admiration of every passer-by beyond the railings as he skirted the road under the borough walls. She had chosen a peaceful and sequestered spot, for opposite her dwelling rose the blank windowless back of Chandos Chambers, much affected by bachelors of quality; while the remaining side (the fourth being occupied by the Borough Road) was closed by the wall of Tewkesbury gardens, whose venerable trees feathered over the coping, affording a grateful shade. To make the sense of quiet more complete, a distant hum buzzed now and then across the gardens from the courtyard of the Hart beyond, where groaning coaches tumbled in all day, and grooms hissed and whistled, and horses were forever being curry-combed. Hidden among the stately trees was the residence of the gouty old Duke of Tewkesbury, who profitably spent his time in ogling the maid of honour over the boundary wall, tossing amorous little poems to her, and pressing his senile suit by quavering madrigals. Thus, although secluded, she was never without amusement, for if dull or lonely at any time, she had but to carol a stave among her gravestones for the aged Duke's head to pop out instantly from amid the branches, singing a cracked air in reply, as he balanced his unwieldy person on a ladder. His Grace had sworn that some day or other she

should be his wife, that he would outlive, if needful, one and all of her adorers, that (better late than never) he would lead a *passée* duchess to the altar, and considering the persistency of the ancient beau, Lady Grizel treated him right scurvily. She toyed with him, stroked and patted him, shot killing arrows from her sapphire eyes at him, which quivered in his battered old heart—then laughed her jocund laugh and ran away. But a Tewkesbury was never conquered, and his Grace was worthy of his lineage. The more she teased him the more he vowed that some day she should be his chattel, the more he pestered her with nosegays and fruit and florid odes.

She was looking her loveliest on this bright spring morning as she flitted in a gauzy sacque among the flowers attending to her guests, her luxuriant hair escaping in unpowdered masses from beneath a large flap hat, covered with ostrich plumes, which screened her peerless complexion from the sun. The Princess of Wales picnicked under a thorn-bush in a corner, balancing her plate upon a slab sacred to the memory of Jane Hales, who, like most dead people, had been remarkable in life for every virtue. The Earl of Bute waited upon her with ponderous gallantry in his faded suit (for, like most of the Scotch nobility, my lord was poor), and she listened, entranced by his solemn verbiage. The Prince of Wales lolled on a bank,

looking fretfully at Mr. Pitt, whose gaunt upright figure always annoyed him in that its straightness seemed a protest against servility. The Prince liked to see men bow and scrape and lick his boot, and to receive their homage languidly. In this, at least, he was a true son of the strutting little sultan, his papa; and he would specially have prized such worship from Mr. Pitt, whose austere uncompromising virtue was an unceasing cause of dread and wonder to him. But Mr. Pitt's mind was occupied with worthier subjects than the Prince of Wales. His brow was clouded. He was brooding as usual over the last insult from France; the sins of omission and commission of the Duke of Newcastle, who was, he hourly averred, bending his back to the digging of his country's grave. Fresh news had arrived that very morning which afflicted the patriot's soul. Yet what could he do? Although the people looked to him as to the "coming man," yet the King hated him because he loved not Hanover. The mail had brought him letters but an hour since wherein he was implored to come forth into the arena, and in replying to his wife's brother, Mr. George Grenville, he had said:

"The weight of irremovable royal displeasure is too great to move under. While I stick fast aground I afford the world the ridiculous spectacle of being passed by every boat that navigates the river. I despair of public affairs unless a sense of impending

disaster should wake an age sunk to the lips in supineness. Situated as I am, I cannot advance, but must needs stand, lance in rest, trusting that my chance may come."

Stone and Wilkes, recking little of the situation, sat side by side in the highest spirits. The polished tusks of the former gleamed like summer lightning, for it was with joy that he felt in his hand a chain which should curb the haughty beauty; while his friend found much food for pleasantly cynical meditation in marking the elephantine graces and portentous periods of the shabby-looking Scottish lord. "A pedlar in politics and manners," he reflected to himself. "Selfish and vain, puffed with conceit, an egregious trifler. Oh, woman, woman! Here is a well-meaning narrow-minded royal creature whose heart is caught in the tattered plaid-folds of this empty scarecrow!"

Mr. Nash amply made up for the stiffness of Mr. Pitt's carriage by his own complaisance. Clad in a new suit of the pearliest grey, and wearing a hat of transcendent whiteness, his clumsy thickset figure ambled among the grassy knolls like an arm-chair on wheels, as he fussed hither and thither with Bohea for the ladies and prattled of the Chinese fête and the latest arrivals. "One," he said, "hath writ to me in secret for rooms, whose appearance will be a surprise to all and a joy to at least somebody. Nay!" he laughed, wagging his

huge head till the cheeks shook again. "I may not divulge. As handsome a spark as ever squeezed a lemon. Though beauty is unimportant in a man, as I always say. Wit and fine clothes alone would ruin a nunnery. Look at Mr. Wilkes there. How plain, but how successful with the sex."

"Oo's gumming?" cried the Princess, on the alert at once. But the King of Bath was obdurate, merely shaking back his ruffles and repeating: "All in good time, all in good time."

Parson Ames sat humbly in the background within shadow of his lord the Bishop, smirking and purring at Mrs. Deborah between bites of buttered toast, who amiably nodded at him from time to time. Both were in the seventh heaven, for the Bishop, glad to please a relative of Lady Grizel's, had given her aunt a formal promise of the parsonage, and the abigail was impatient to doff the apron of service and sail to the dignity of madam in the clergyman's pew. The sun shone on a pleasant party, for all were in good humour except one. Oddly enough, Lady Gladys, usually so serene, seemed out of sorts. She was very pale under her rouge, and her eyes were puffed with weeping. She sniffed at a pouncet-box to save herself from fainting outright. Mr. Nash hazarded sly pleasantries with regard to the coincidence of her depression and the departure of the Honourable Jack on this very morning to join his regiment. She only grew the more

troubled, for Lady Grizel, who was the soul of merriment, joined in the banter, tripped a slow dance measure amid the flowers, and went off into peals of laughter which were re-echoed by Mr. Stone as he showed his gleaming tusks.

At the rippling signal of her voice his Grace of Tewkesbury's head appeared above the wall with a low obeisance for their Highnesses and a special grin for their hostess.

"Happy, happy, happy fair," he piped in his cracked treble, "whose eyes are loadstars and whose tongue sweet air!"

Lady Grizel danced up to him with a dish of tea in one hand and her hoop held up in the other, the better to ravish her adorer with a glimpse of gold-clocked stockings.

"Your Grace shall be favoured with tea from my own spoon," she declared with mock gravity, "and so refreshed you shall be privileged to join our party provided you climb over the wall. Behold a tombstone and a window-sill at becoming distance. Mr. Wilkes and Mr. Pitt shall lend a hand. Nay, sir. I am queen here and brook no rebels. Forget the state of Europe at my bidding, and help down his Grace with care lest a garter be made vacant through an accident."

Mr. Pitt's gloomy features relaxed into a smile, for did he not believe in the theory of the Beautiful and Good, and must not such unusual beauty as this

damsel possessed of necessity be allied to an angel's soul? Here was the perfection of the Beautiful and Good; of goodness, moreover, of no negative kind. That large, firm, finely-formed white hand betrayed a latent power ready for self-assertion, held in check for the present by the gush of girlhood. So Mr. Pitt loved the Lady Grizel in a platonic way and, like all the rest, gladly did her bidding.

As she flitted in gauzy drapery between the gravestones, snatching idly at a blossom or a tendril, Lady Gladys scanned the movements of her rival with a feverish look. Could Lord Gowering's daughter be two women? Was this stately creature who aped the gambols of a kitten the same whom she saw last night by the glimmer of a candle in a parson's hat standing before the priest with *him*—the man whom she had learned to consider as her own? Or was the dreadful nightmare the product of a distempered brain? No. These kittenish ways were forced. A hectic spot stood on each cheekbone. There was no ring upon the wedding finger, yet it must be true.

My Lord Bute was pouring into the willing ears of her Royal Highness his views on the prerogative of royalty, which pleasingly coincided with her own.

"I am the champion of the prerogative," he was saying with pompous emphasis. "I bow to the dictum of wise King James who decided that kings may justly be called gods, since they exercise a

manner of divine power on earth. They make or unmake their subjects, give life or death, exalt or abase. I trust that when his Highness comes to his own he will take prompt measures for curbing the mob, which is inclined to usurp the rights of royalty into its own hands to the scandal of loyal subjects. Unseemly affrays are of daily occurrence. The low people, drunk with license, are turbulent to a shocking degree, and such effervescence is most dangerous. Mr. Pitt disagrees with me, I am sorry to see. I regret also to know that he sides with the oligarchy of great Whig families who also put forward pretensions to the detriment of the Crown. Such pretensions must be nipped, or majesty will be swallowed up. I would divide all the great aristocratic connections, and so make them harmless, as you separate a bundle of sticks by removing the willow-band."

"Such a war against established power is usually waged by those who would build upon its ruins," observed Wilkes dryly. "As for a mob, there is nothing so easily guided or so useful if cleverly managed. I admit that the people of late have assumed undue license; and through whose fault? Through that of ministers who are silly enough to storm instead of to cajole. I vow I would back myself to twist King Mob round my finger, if I were to take the trouble, by an ingenious system of flattery. Happily the common business of nations

is carried on by scrubs, or where should we be amongst a cloud of ignorant ministers headed by kings who think of nothing but their mistresses?"

My lord raised his eyebrows, and looked down upon the rude young man.

"Sir," he said with dignity, "I do not know you, and the peculiarity of your aspect doth not fill me with that desire. The Earl of Bute can have little in common with a person who is said to be a brewer's son."

The bungling arrow missed its mark, for Mr. Wilkes was no little proud of his appearance, being in the habit of observing that half an hour of his converse would efface all memory of his ugliness. And he was ugly; for his forehead was receding, low, and short; his nose shorter and his lip long. His sunken eyes squinted so horribly that the line of vision must have crossed within an inch of his nose. His teeth were quite black at twenty-one, and he lisped. He contented himself with murmuring:

"Hungry he came, marking his slimy road

With noisome trail—a pinched and half-starved toad!"

while the Prince of Wales smiled in the middle of a yawn, for so long as he was but a prince it amused him for his father's sake to hear kings reviled.

Mr. Pitt observed reflectively, "Whatever my feelings with regard to the great aristocratic

families, I must always hold in the greatest respect and love the body of the British people. Their virtues are rude and uncultivated, but great and sincere. They understand by instinct the broad rights of humanity, and have the spirit to maintain them; and that despite disadvantages and the example of a corrupt nobility. What is finer than the true English yeoman? Stalwart in thew and sinew, shrewd, sturdy, upright, proud, generous, independent. With a less abject hand at the State helm what might not be made of such raw stuff; the same stuff from which were fashioned the legions of Elizabeth and Cromwell? England might hold again the van amongst the nations. Will it ever be, or must this cycle of shame and insult overwhelm us?"

"That is not quite my view of the people," whispered Wilkes confidentially to Stone. "Knaves and fools, say I, to be led by the silly nose by subtler knaves than they. Salt once deftly put upon their tails, what a weapon for good or evil!"

Such grave talk was interrupted by a fresh sally of Lady Grizel's.

Little Prince George and his dear playmate, black-eyed Sarah, had left the joys of cake and jam for the artless pleasures of wreath-weaving. The boy had strung together a chaplet of flowers with which he was proceeding to decorate the mob-cap to its owner's intense satisfaction, when the maid of honour

stole up on tiptoe, snatched the prize, and skipping on to the slab which bore the virtues of Jane Hales, placed it round her own hat.

“Fair to the fair!” she cried. “The minx learns coquetry betimes. Go stitch thy sampler, scorpion, and leave such vanities to thy betters.”

The old Duke clapped his hands in ecstasy, for the gold clocks were again visible and the suave outlines of the lithe figure shone out in ravishing undulations against a background of leaves. There was a tussle. The passionate little girl tore her tormentor’s skirts, and was rewarded by a tap on the head from a teaspoon, while the boy turned in anger to his mother, who was too much interested in Lord Bute’s inspired platitudes to heed so sublunary a quarrel. The Prince of Wales swore with oaths that Grizel was a good fellow, who should play Sir Harry Wildair at the Leicester House theatricals, and the Scotch lord was aghast at so awful a sacrifice of decorum within sight of the public road. Mr. Pitt smiled sadly, which brought on him the raillery of the delinquent.

“Mr. Pitt, Mr. Pitt!” she cried, waving her spoon, “you look frightful when cross. You are setting your features for a stone periwig in Westminster Abbey. If you will be cheerful I promise you an apotheosis in marble when you die, with weeping cupids and despairing goddesses with trumpets. This beauteous world was given us for mirth. See how awakening nature is bursting into

bloom. A funeral pageant is a masquerade to you. Is this a man or a vampire?"

"Lady Grizel, Lady Grizel!" he returned, "such fleckless enjoyment of life may well make us dreary folks feel sad, who remember that autumn winds will come to sweep down these budding leaves in showers!"

"It is a vampire!" cried Lady Grizel, tossing the wreath away with pettish gesture.

"Not so," pursued Mr. Pitt sombrely, "only a man beating vainly against a spell. We are all governed by a potent spirit, Anagke, Goddess of Necessity, whose sable robe is the Inevitable. The ancients believed in the existence of three Fates who together wove and cut the cord of human destiny. Folly! Such a tangle could but be the work of *one*, who spins and twists with true feminine caprice. We toil and fight against the knots and loops which are due to her slovenliness, and what fools we are! Can efforts of ours smooth out the skein? In striving to unknot it we only strangle ourselves. Better to let be, leaving the responsibility with her, for none may withstand the caprices of her will."

"He is here!" shouted out Mr. Nash from the railings, who, looking upon the gloomy Lord of the Bedchamber in the light of a wet blanket, always made a point of retiring out of reach of his discourse. "He is here! His carriage passes under

the Westgate, a foreign coach gorgeously equipped. Did I not say he was expected? By virtue of his rank he deserves a double peal of bells. I will go see to it."

The coach, instead of taking the usual route to the Hart yard, turned abruptly to the left, and drew up with a flourish of hoof-clatter and whip-cracking in front of the railings which closed in the graveyard. A posse of running footmen in short silken skirts and silver liveries with coronets upon the shoulders panted round the door, flung down the steps with a crash, and opened the wicket in the railing. A young man emerged, attired in the height of fashion, his hair elaborately piled and powdered according to the last Parisian mode, and hasted straight to Jane Hales's memorial slab whereon still stood the Lady Grizel—a statue now of death. Her hat had fallen off, her long hair grey with the powder of yesterday fell upon her shoulders, her large eyes looked unnaturally blue from out of her blanched face. She clasped her bosom with both hands.

"The Duke of Hamilton!" ejaculated the Prince of Wales. "A charming surprise, indeed. Grizel said she thought you at Vienna."

"Did she then not receive the letter I writ from Paris?" inquired the Duke, taking the hand of his betrothed with courtly gallantry and kissing it.

Lady Grizel descended from her pedestal and coldly tendered her brow to his embrace.

“How passing fair!” murmured the young Duke in admiration. “In all my polite tour I saw no loveliness like this.”

“Come, gentlemen and ladies,” exclaimed the Prince of Wales. “Her Royal Highness must hold her *levée* in the pump-room. After a long separation these turtle-doves will have many soft trifles to interchange. We will leave them with this moral for their wooing. See how these tangled flowers here grow out of the bodies of the dead. All that’s bright must fade, you know. Let us all profit by the sunshine while we can.”

The Princess went away under convoy of my Lord Bute. Lady Gladys walked next with flushed face, leaning on the Prince’s arm. Little Sarah, cowed by the ashen pallor which had withered the roses of her enemy, clung to Prince George, her champion. The rest followed pellmell. The running footmen sped away to recruit their exhausted energies with flip. The sun shone upon the immaculate virtues of Jane Hales, tipping each word with splendour. The tiny graveyard was deserted by all but the twain. There was a pause of embarrassment ere the young Duke broke the silence.

“This is a strange welcome, Grizel,” he said. “I thought to have given you a pleasant surprise.”

“A pleasant surprise, truly,” sighed his betrothed.

“Therefore in my last letter I said I would stop in Paris; but I could not wait. Hearing the music

of your laughter just now I urged my postilions to a gallop, and it is as much as you can do to conjure up a smile."

"Your last letter," echoed Lady Grizel huskily.

"Admit that I am a pattern lover," went on his Grace, "who deserve better at your hands than this. For two long years I have not missed a single courier. In remote spots I have even taken the precaution to send a duplicate to your aunt Hanmer, so that you should be spared none of my prosing. How strangely you look! One would say I were a ghost risen unwelcome from the earth!"

"My aunt Hanmer," stammered the girl with white lips. "You sent letters to Aunt Hanmer?"

"Yes. You are faint. Fool that I was to venture on this jest. I forgot the delicate fibre of a young lady's nature."

"Ay! a ghost," murmured she, "of a dead love buried."

Withdrawing her icy hands from those of the Duke, Lady Grizel clasped her brows. Her lips quivered for an instant as she looked round for her aunt, but that aged sinner had hobbled away in extreme haste; then she lowered her eyes again, calm but very pale.

"Explain this singular behaviour," said his Grace in a tone of pique. "Have you ceased to care for me? Have you sunk under the ordeal you yourself prescribed? If so, be not afraid, but tell me."

With a slight contraction of the brow she answered in a low voice :

“Afraid ! What cause have I for fear ? You are right. I have changed my mind.”

The Duke bit his lip and looked at her. After a pause he shook his head.

“There is something under this which I *will* fathom. You ceased writing to me months ago, and I thought your position at court was answerable for it, for maids of honour at beck and call of *blasé* royalty have few moments to themselves. If you had ceased to care for me why not free me with a word, instead of scoffing at my effusions (as I will be sworn you did) week after week with the other maids ?”

“Week after week !” wailed Lady Grizel. “’Tis sixteen months since you writ aught to me.”

There was another pause, during which his Grace’s heel played havoc among the creeping plants.

“What is this ?” he asked. “My letters have been intercepted ; why ? By whom ? I am too young to have an enemy. By whom ? can you tell ? Think !”

She raised her eyes and looked him coldly in the face.

“No ; I cannot tell !”

“But no harm is done,” cried the Duke, twining his arm about her waist, “since here we are together. Whoever this snake in the grass may be we will foil him.”

With a weary sigh Lady Grizel disengaged herself, and formed the words painfully with dry lips :

“No ! We must part—here—now—for ever ! I beseech you, go !”

The Duke moved a step away in anger.

“Some one has supplanted me,” he said fiercely, “who is it ? I will track him out.”

“Useless—I love no one. No ; nor ever can ! Torment me no more. I will never marry you. On my soul I swear it.”

Her figure was drawn up to its full height. He saw in her squared brows and set face that her words were not idly spoken. His pride came to the rescue.

“Have your will,” he said haughtily ; “JILT !” and so departed.

When he was gone she clutched at her throat as if to pluck thence a band which choked her ; and sinking slowly down upon the ground, sat motionless, staring at the alley by which he had departed, like one who has been felled by a sickening blow. Idly she took up the wreath cast from her in her petulance and plucked it to shreds, till nothing but smooth green stalks remained.

“Poor little elfish Sarah !” she muttered. “How I teased the child and she tore my robe in wrath, and I have naught to tear but my own heart-strings. Oh ! if I might wrench them out !”

Then a smile passed over her face as a pageant like Banquo’s issue passed across her mind. The

shameful king and his love, my Lady Yarmouth; the opposition *ménage* at Leicester House—scarcely more respectable; the society in which she moved. This little prattling pair of infants crying out their eyes about a wreath, and quite successfully mimicking the evil passions of their elders. Did not the whole world appear too ridiculous a place for anything but laughter? Then the depth of her own difficulties forced itself upon her.

“Tricked, duped, ruined, by my own flesh and blood! why? What had I done to her that she should coil round me this vile web? For that hag has lied to me more persistently than did the serpent. Prim, proper, handsome Mr. Bellasis too! What had I done that he should wreck my life?”

For a long while she sat vaguely thinking. Then a whirling storm of hate welled up within the maid of honour; such a storm as she had never known by the remote western sea; such a storm of indignation as caused her hot eyes to burn, her brain to throb, as though her head must burst. She rose up suddenly, ground her set teeth, and shook a clenched white hand at the clear heaven; then dashing it down on the slab of the departed Hales, and tracing the sunlit virtues with a shivering finger, she laughed a harsh, jarring laugh, and sank down again, marvelling at the strange new sound of it.

Egged on by snares in a moment of temporary

exasperation to wed a man for whom she cared nothing, she turned over in her mind the possible phases of her life now that she hated him. For she did hate his smooth prim face with all the force of her strong nature now. He was gone (that was a mercy) to join his regiment, and the soldier's bride promised herself to see that face no more. What a merciful dispensation that he should be gone! In the first boiling of her rage his wife could have stabbed him for the vulgar trick. Thank God that he was gone! She had much credit with the Princess of Wales; would bring the batteries of her beauty to bear on the Prime Minister, his Grace of Newcastle; on anybody; would shrink at nothing to obtain the banishment of that regiment abroad; and once abroad, she swore by ruse and trick to keep it out of England. Perhaps he would die—there are fearful fevers in the Indies—and she would be free! As the beautiful girl, gathering her torn draperies, schemed and revolved plan after plan in the chaos of her mind, she began to feel that her character was changing; that human kindness was curdling under this sudden and overwhelming tide of outrage; and the devil whispered that she should glory in it. To what a descending flight of infamy might not such a condition of mind be the first landing-stage? Alone in the world (for Jasper was gone she knew not whither), betrayed by her only other living relative! She told herself that

the world had basely crushed one who had done harm to no one, and who was without defence. It must needs be a vile world. She owed it nothing henceforth. Whatever enormities she might be goaded to commit she would pile upon its head, and hold herself scot free. Anagke indeed ! The spirit in the sable garment called the Inevitable ! Would that spirit's mischievous tangle suffocate her ? Thrice damned spiteful goddess of the loops and knots. Was it not cruel beyond belief thus to encompass and clog a trustful innocent soul on its first ignorant start upon the road ? A cowardly malicious spirit. The Inevitable, quotha ! As she had been shown no mercy, so would she show none to others. As Anagke had been pitiless, so would she too be pitiless. Then as she leaned her cheek upon the slab, she seemed by whimsical fancy to be assisting at her own burial—weeping over her own tomb. The bright, giddy, rather overbold girl was no more. What manner of woman was this who stood up in her place ? The fair clay which might have been moulded (had Anagke been less spiteful) into eternal beauty was baked hard into a false shape for ever ; cracked too, and riven in the scorching furnace. She cast a lingering look at her dead self, and plucking flowers strewed them on a visionary grave—jonquils, and marigolds, and primroses, first-fruits of spring. And as idly she did this, she smiled drearily at the conceit.

It was interesting to survey this dead self ere the grate closed on it for ever. Which of us would not feel awe at gazing on his own corpse? An impulsive recklessness of consequences appeared among the chief characteristics of the defunct, which was a mental shortness of vision. There was also an aimless waywardness and caprice which when thwarted settled into purpose. Lady Grizel had in the first instance fixed her choice on his Grace of Hamilton because it appeared needful to choose somebody, and he shone out in person as well as in position beyond his fellows. When he had seemed to treat her cavalierly her pride rebelled at his defection, and she clung the closer to him. Then when her aunt whispered with nods and winks that he had flung her from him to be picked up again at leisure later—that she, idolised toast of the town, would become its laughing-stock; then came that fatal show of temper and its result—a result of a moment of pique—which had turned her blood to gall. Truly this corpse of her former self was not an exhilarating spectacle. With a clang she closed the grate and dropped the slab, and turned to contemplate the new manner of woman. The same traits, the same features were there; but altered, sharpened, distorted. This new woman sorrowed vaguely for the Duke (really gone beyond recall), not for himself, his youth, or noble air—but for his coronet. The new woman mused regretfully upon the position the

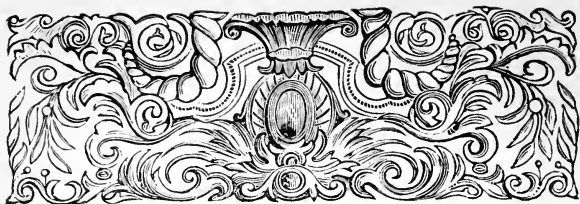
corpse might have held. How royally she would have queened it! How she would have dazzled Europe with her wealth, her glory, her beauty, her position!

A little damsel paddling barefoot by the sea-shore. A dried-up maid of honour tied to celibacy, and a paltry salary. Such was to be the end of peerless charms! For hotly she swore never to stir foot or finger to do anything but ruin that prim smooth-faced audacious lad. What a melancholic end to a promising beginning! The heart of Lady Grizel was exceeding sorry, and she sighed.

“Happy, happy, happy fair!” quavered a piping voice over the wall, and the irrepressible grinning satyr with a garter ribbon bobbed up his hoary head. The voice of the Duke of Tewkesbury sent a new stab into her bosom.

“I might have had *him*,” she thought, as she twined her strong fingers tightly; “and his years would have perforce soon set me free. Instead of wealth and tottering old age and station, a penniless healthy prim lieutenant with comely cheeks who looks to me to build his fortunes. Never, so help me God! Fool, fool, fool! Do I not deserve my lot?”

So the brother and sister started on the same stony road, each one a stranger to the other’s trouble.



CHAPTER VIII.

A GRAVE CHAPTER WHICH MAY NOT BE SKIPPED.



NINE years have come and gone, and Father Time has not been idle. As he passed some of the characters in this our chronicle he shook out his sand by handfuls, while for others he playfully waved the glass and sped swiftly by. Some are dead, some are wrecks, some but little changed as regards the rind.

The Duke of Newcastle misrules England with a consistency worthy of a better end, and she sinks under his yoke to the lowest pitch of despondency. Nine years ago the Prince of Wales was waiting for his father's shoes, wondering that he could not have the grace to die ; Mr. Pitt was longing for his opportunity ; adventurers in shoals were attaching themselves to the car of the rising sun. No wonder ; for his Majesty was cross and disreputable, and above all

things *old* ; whilst the Prince, if silly and vicious, was young and might mend. But how crazy are the castles which we build ! Time, as crusty and captious as the King himself, mowed down the son who died, while his venerable father received a new lease of life. Frederick Prince of Wales died of a cold, and was buried like a dog. Though the greedy King had amassed millions he declined to pay his son's debts or mourn for him, and great was the panic in the ranks of the Prince's adherents who had aspired to bask in their lord's rays through a long lifetime. Some fled from Leicester House like rats from a doomed ship, and strove to make their peace with George II. Some went abroad to watch events, feeling as guilty as if they had been Jacobites. The Newcastle faction took under its wing many of the opposition, now leaderless ; the rest, headed by the Earl of Bute, rallied round the flag of the Princess Dowager. The solemn Earl was in full feather now, and the apple of the eye of the royal lady. Her heart had long gone begging, and no one had cared to have it, for its owner was uncomely, until my Lord Bute, with an eye to loaves and fishes, took it up and placed it in his bosom. Then was it edifying to behold the two, to mark with what gravity he stirred round her medicines, with what zeal he wrote out her bills of fare. Soon she vowed she could not move a step without the arm of her dear friend, and people declared that if

edifying to a sentimental mind it was also extremely improper.

Oddly enough, the person whose susceptibilities were the most shocked was his Gracious Majesty, who affected, from out of his harem of stout sultanas, to be much grieved at the frailty of his daughter-in-law. It was in mercy, he sighed, that darling Fred (whom he loathed in life) had been taken up to Heaven lest his too sensitive soul should be distressed by the behaviour of his consort—dear delicate-minded creature, whose evenings were spent in orgies with the royal midwife, whose chief glory had been a bearfight or a main of cocks. The little sultan was mightily displeased with the conduct of the widow, who did not improve matters by pretending great fondness for his arch-enemy. He always called Mr. Pitt his arch-enemy, and the name of that rueful person was like burnt bird-wings in his nostrils, because Mr. Pitt preferred England to Hanover, and was for shortening his Majesty's flights thitherward. Mr. Pitt was a constant visitor at Leicester House, a firm friend to its mistress (although he held in most profound contempt the Earl of Bute), and was more than ever the coming man. It was due to his own attitude that he held no more important office than that of pay-master. Newcastle, timid as foolish, shrank like a crumbled scroll under the sarcasm with which Pitt was beginning to lash his incompetence. "He is a gorgon's

head," the minister groaned; "he bristles with bayonets and pistols, and can tickle to death with a feather. The man's a complete armoury, a hornet's nest of slashing satire." The goggle-eyed Duke's first impulse was to bribe the scourge, acting on Fox's principle that all men have their price. And indeed at this time a lust of lucre was the all-pervading passion. The pursuit of pleasure was the supreme occupation; and here we have the key to that venality, rapacity, and avarice, which specially distinguished our countrymen during these years. For as the subjects of an arbitrary prince (under whom it is dangerous to be thought rich) accumulate wealth to hoard it, so these on the contrary heaped only to squander, making their growing liberty a cloak for their licentiousness.

Mr. Pitt declined to be bought. The Duke sent his *protégé* Andrew Stone to dazzle him with promises, but he replied coldly that he could never act in conjunction with any old woman, male or female; that he was in disgrace with his Majesty, and would not force himself forward unless England were in her death-throes. He had often spoken vigorously against the King's measures on behalf of Hanover, declaring on one occasion that that prized electorate was too insignificant to be marked on a map. Though the King danced with rage, yet did the patriot's conduct raise him high in the esteem of the nation. Far-seeing old Sarah Marlborough left him

on her death-bed a nest-egg of ten thousand pounds. Newcastle, in his terror, was for flattering the patriot, and wrote imploring his irascible Majesty to let this roaring lion into the cabinet. The King kicked all his servants round the room with square-toed shoe, then smashed his pen in his hurry to blot out the hated name.

“A half-promise to my Lord Cobham, is it?” he cried. “Such promises must be broken.”

And the minister murmured in his misery:

“How then shall we muzzle this dreadful Mr. Pitt?”

Mr. Pitt lost nothing by remaining lance in rest. The people, refreshed by so astounding a spectacle as that of a real living honest man, came by degrees to worship him. His restrained powers seemed as awful as the growling of the sea—the premonitory lashing of a heaving element which moved by wind will rise in overwhelming wrath to spread destruction broadcast. Men doffed their hats as he strode along in his black velvet, bowed their heads before the well-known white face and eagle nose, moved to make way for his chair when gout deprived him of his faculties. For he was a terrible invalid. The fire of his great soul burned up that frail tenement his body.

The patience of his people with their disgraceful old monarch (despite Lord Bute’s horror of the license of King Mob) was touching. Having had

already much bitter experience of civil war, they strove to see a worthy figure sitting on the throne instead of a puling pantaloon, but this did not prevent them from gibing at the Princess Dowager and her Scotch Earl, as well as at the foolish Duke of Newcastle. The latter permitted the King to dally with the sultanas at Herrenhausen, and to send over frivolous orders anent pipe-claying, when the country's vital interests were threatened. French diplomatists were playing with English ones, amusing them with new-fangled games at cards to cover their encroachments in the Indies; sending pretty messages to the fat sultanas while they were debauching our allies in Africa and tampering with our settlements on the Mississippi. They quietly backed our Canadian plantations with chains of forts, so as to starve out our trade, plausibly observing that by the Treaty of Utrecht the absolute interests of all parties in that quarter were equally problematic; in which probably they were not wrong, considering that in earlier days a cross of sticks set up on a rock by a shipwrecked mariner often gave to his king the first right to an unknown tract of country. If that king professed a conscience he gravely bought the country to all eternity for a bundle of jewsharpes, and in exchange taught his new subjects the uses of brandy and the New Testament. In the case of England and France the settling of colonial boundaries was attended with unusual complica-

tions, owing to the ignorance of geography of the British Board of Trade. The incessant aggressions of the French in America could no longer be concealed. A member rose in the House indignantly to demand whether Annapolis was to be defended ; to which the Duke of Newcastle replied lightly :

“ Oh, dear me ! Of course it shall. Annapolis ! where in the devil’s name is it ? ”

At this time his cupboards were bursting with dusty memorials from colonists entreating his immediate protection from the foe.

Rumours were wafted, none knew whence, of mighty armaments preparing to leave the ports of France for the West Indies ; of regiments marching to the sea-coast. Mr. Pitt writhed and wrung his hands ; the King lay in the lap of the fat seraglio, the Duke of Newcastle slumbered. For economy’s sake our battalions were shorn of half their complement, and hosts of disbanded soldiers turned out to prey upon the high-roads ; our state at home was naked and defenceless ; Ireland was ripe for revolt. The few muskets available were of knavish Hanoverian make, which no men durst fire lest they should explode in their hands. French vessels bearing men and munitions sailed for western waters. Newcastle, in astonishment, rubbed his goggle eyes. “ Bless my soul ! Can they really mean aggression ? ” A few vessels were sent out to reconnoitre under Captain Howe. Ships of either

country popped at those of the other when they met, though none could say whether war was really to be declared or not. The indignant people rose like one man, demanding that steps should at least be taken for protection at home; further rumours having arrived that France, emboldened by immunity, actually intended to sweep down upon our coasts. The minister howled out that it was truly unkind to take him unawares. The King, astutely seizing his opportunity, poured streams of Hessians and Hanoverians into England for her protection, who camped about the country and found billets in each homestead. If the people would not allow their King to live at Hanover, at least he would surround his English palace with German moonfaces. The *bourgeoisie* looked imploringly to Pitt as to their only hope, yet he stirred not. Evil news came from all quarters; still he remained passive. Gibraltar and Minorca, in the Mediterranean, were seriously threatened, and neither was prepared for a vigorous defence. Tidings of disaster arrived from America. General Braddock attempted the seizure of the French forts on the Ohio, and commenced by an attack on Fort Duquesne. He was killed, his army routed. Even my Lord Bute, who, in his ponderous way, was jealous of the patriot, implored him to make an effort for his country's sake, declaring that the King's private animosity must give way before public interests. Still Pitt shook his head, saying:

“Not yet. I am the people’s champion. When the time comes, please God, I will take the helm for them, despite all the kings in Christendom.”

The paths of virtue are beset with snares. The patriot as yet had only theorised. His private character was speckless, but it remained to be proved whether he were capable of saving a nation *in extremis*. His enemies were legion, for the children of darkness have detested the children of light time out of mind. From among his few allies he specially singled out for his affection Mr. George Grenville (his wife’s brother), who dabbled a little in politics and was spoken of as promising. He was plodding, short-sighted, and narrow-minded—was George Grenville; obstinate, too, as a mule. But he looked upon his friend and brother-in-law as on a demigod, and kept up his failing courage when sorely sick at heart, which may be counted unto George Grenville as righteousness of a secondary sort. The selfish frivolity of the mass of the nobility at this critical juncture was humiliating to patriots, and seems almost inconceivable to us oldsters as we look back on it. Both golden youth and silver age vowed, that, come rack come ruin, they could not and would not dispense with French cooks and valets; that, invasion or no invasion, their Parisian *friseurs* were amongst the first necessities of life. Luxury and unbridled vice had done their work on them—had eaten away their sense of self-respect. So it came

about that throughout the great war which shortly after shook the world, the strange spectacle was presented of the lords of the soil served for a wage in their bed-chambers by their national enemies ; and this, together with a continued use of French silks and cosmetics, served to make yet wider the breach which already yawned between the upper and lower orders.

Moral as well as physical drunkenness was, during the last years of the royal pantaloon, the characteristic of society. Excitement was necessary to existence. The nobles were illiterate and idle. The domestic hearth existed not. My lady Countess spent her days at the milliner's or the toyshop, her nights at Ranelagh or Vauxhall. Wives abandoned husbands to their mistresses, children to their abigails, for the all-absorbing interest of cards. What more natural then that my lord should prefer to his deserted home a cosy tavern where he could eat, drink, and sleep, and rise up to play ? As the vacancy of their heads forbade their ever opening a book, my lords and my ladies occupied such minds as they possessed with sight-seeing and intrigue. They spent hours in a garret to see a Cock Lane ghost, or posted off along dangerous roads to have their fortunes told by the last fashionable gipsy.

I know that I am not painting the friends of my boyhood in pleasant colours, but truth generally wears an ugly robe—doth she not ? The young

nobles of my youthful time had an excuse for their way of life, which consisted in their deplorable education. In defiance of the peril of casting fledglings unprotected into the vortex of Vanity Fair, it was made imperative by fashion that all modish parents should send forth their adolescent sons on the grand tour. For three years they were enjoined to roam about the most seductive continental capitals with a livingless parson as a mentor, who was a blind guide indeed; it being clearly his interest to pander to the budding desires of his young patron in order that on a later day he might slip into the post of chaplain to a new lord. So the model pupils returned home, extolled by their tutors after their pilgrimage, wiser, if not better men. For if they had acquired no book-lore, they had at least laid up a magazine of fascinating new-fangled vices, of ruined health, of promising intellects clouded. They had so loaded themselves with debt, too, that there was no use in trying to live decently any more.

Superstition is twin sister to Ignorance, and on the common ground alone of superstition highest and lowest classes met—but not in amity. Fatalism and the theory of the Long Sleep without a Waking is all very well for ordinary practice. We may sing a ribald song and skip gaily off the ladder into the unknown, as the highwaymen did, but phenomena sometimes arise which, for a moment, disturb our

theories, though we may relapse afterwards into the accustomed groove.

In the year 1750, two shocks of earthquake were felt in London which affected the two extremes of society in a different way. There was a panic among the dukes and duchesses. Man can only die once, they were wont to aver. But what an unpleasant death to be swallowed by an earthquake! The churches, used hitherto only for sleep and scandal, were filled with penitents who howled over their sins. Some one arose who predicted another and more fearful visitation as being imminent. The aristocracy scampered from the doomed city to encamp in the fields, having taken the precaution to put on "earthquake gowns" or long woollen wrappers, whose folds should preserve their blue blood from freezing. The fields were inundated with chairs, chaises, coaches; from all of which craned heads during the suspense of night in hourly expectation of a catastrophe. The Princess Dowager and her maids of honour occupied an inn at Hampstead, where they played brag till dawn, then drove comfortably back to town to look for their friends' bones amid the rubbish. No doubt it was disappointing to have risked influenza for nothing (for no further shocks occurred), and golden youth and silver age returned to their habitual courses, vowing fierce vengeance of cudgel and sword on the false prophets who had made fools of them.

With the common people it was otherwise. Their lines were not cast in pleasant places. They were already doing an amateur purgatory upon earth. They preferred to consider the threatened visitation as a judgment on their betters, not on themselves; and so they found comfort from their own terror in a simmering warfare against the rich. In furtherance of the natural law which teaches that a demand creates its own supply, new leaders appeared to head the crusade in the persons of Whitefield and Wesley—ascetic teachers of an infant doctrine which the oppressed poor, accustomed to brandy-parsons as ministers of religion, embraced by hundreds.

The condition of the poor (bad enough before) had altered for the worse during these nine years which we are surveying. Robbery and outrage had increased so alarmingly that the public mind took fright. The wasp was using his sting more and more. Where was a towel to flap him out of life? England—country of quacks—sought for a common panacea, an universal anodyne, and seemed to have found it in the noose. The gallows, used freely enough before, became now the cure for everything. The approaches to London lay between long files of serried gibbets. In all directions were avenues of triple-trees thick with clustering fruit. The new contest, like all which are induced by fear, served but to exasperate both parties. Magistrates grew angry that criminals would not be reclaimed by rule

of thumb, and proceeded to string them up by fifties for their contumacy. The dangerous class became the more callous and ferocious as the citizens cried in their dread for more victims. Far-seeing people wagged their periwigs, declaring that no good was ever done by wholesale slaughter. And they were right, for thieves were so used to contemplate the gallows that they spoke of their fate as "half an hour's pastime," dreading it no whit—as part of the inevitable. Of what value could your uncomfortable existence be if it could be lightly taken from you for purloining an old coat or a salt herring? Acts of violence only increased with the law's cruelty. A stupid pedagogue numbs a boy's being by excessive punishment. I recall terrible examples of this indifference when, as a lad, I used to go with the rest to Tyburn. There was Price, I mind me—a merry dog and a shoemaker—who declined Jack Ketch's invitation to depart this life till he had tasted of some curds and whey which a market-wench happened to be bearing past the spot; for, said he, "Who knows when I shall look upon their like again?" Then, his whim being satisfied, he smacked his lips, bowed to the multitude, and took his jump right manfully. Many and many a similar case do I remember.

The common people became rabid with delirious wrath and horribly passive by turns. There was no telling when they might think fit to rise and

practise every enormity. So miserable was their way of life that they seemed to have all to gain and naught to lose. What simpler than from behind to brain a beau who flaunted his broidered velvet before your hungry little ones? The price of his cane or snuff-box would give them the food they craved for. And if caught red-handed—why! you would take your place beside your friends upon the gallows, that was all, and sleep the long sleep without a waking.

Into this Slough of Despond waded Wesley and Whitefield and Lady Huntingdon, who preached of the sins not of one class but of each. They urged that the direly iniquitous amusement of the nobles, yclept masquerades, should be put down, lest God should be tempted to burn London as He did Sodom, and at the same time implored the poor to wallow no more like beasts, but to stand with head erect upon their feet like men. The strangeness of the call roused them from despondent apathy, for here was somebody who did not treat them like dogs or parrots. A rage sprung up for preaching. Men left stalls and booths to exhort the wicked to repentance with passionate tears. The wealthy gibed at interference with their pleasures. The Church was indignant at an infringement of its prerogative. Hysteria is easier than hand-labour, sneered the parsons. But the ascetic demeanour of the new leaders had its effect on their rude flock, who could

dimly discern something sublime in voluntarily facing opprobrium for conscience' sake. The Methodists stirred the long-stagnant water to some purpose. They breathed a new spirit which inspired the abject to try and grope towards the light, and the gulf betwixt nobles and people became hourly wider.

In passing Lady Grizel, Time seemed to have stayed his hand. Sure he dared not mar such loveliness. Nine summers and nine winters! Fairest of the fair she was when last we looked on her: peerless amid the beauties of Leicester House she is still; a trifle fuller and more ripe maybe, like the peach on the garden wall, which, exposed to warm rays and sheltered from envious winds, glows out with the jewelled tints of a church-window. What a false simile! A ripe peach never looks like a church-window, and it would be most improper if it did, for the latter is associated in our minds with "pious orgies," while the former suggests glimpses of chequered sunlight, lovely creatures in diaphanous draperies, the sensuous *abandon* of hot summer in the country—orgies very much the reverse from pious. The ripe peach is rubicund and blushing; Lady Grizel was neither. Proud of her brilliant skin, she never painted her checks, and certainly nobody ever saw the brazen beauty blush. With her hair built up and powdered a dead white, and her unembellished face, she looked, beside the raddled ones

around, like some wondrous spectre with burning sapphire eyes. Her mistress, the Princess Dowager, who fell under her fascination, like all the rest, changed her pet name from "Madgab" to "Lily," and straightway all the Grub Street scribblers vomited forth a cataract of odes adapting the celestial attributes of that stately flower to the toast of the town. Indeed there was but little of the heavenly about the maid of honour now—for maid of honour and unmarried she was still (as was the Lady Gladys), though troops of suitors jostled for her hand. Her wild, girlish glee seemed to have hardened into a gaiety akin to that of Lucifer presiding at a feast. Her laugh could be heard at Ranelagh above the notes of Farinelli; her mirth was exuberant and excessive; yet her eye sparkled with another light from that of yore, which had won each heart by the contagion of its merriment—a fevered, unwholesome light like that which hovers over a long-unburied corpse.

Every one marvelled why she never married. His Grace of Hamilton espoused Miss Gunning, shortly after his return from the grand tour, and retired into the country. Strange that the fair Lady Grizel should consent to wear the willow for him! Did she really adore him, and was she disconsolate for his fickleness? Upon the retirement of the Duke of Hamilton from the list of her slaves, Lady Grizel went abroad, became prime favourite of the Electress

of Saxony, turned all the young male heads in that kingdom, then came home again. Other English lords in plenty laid their honours at her feet. His Grace of Ancaster, of Schomburg, the old Duke of Tewkesbury. The last was certainly no younger or handsomer than he had been nine years before, yet still he sighed—a faithful swain of eighty—and trilled out in vain his shaky old madrigal of “Happy, happy fair.” Not quite in vain though, for if the maid of honour showed partiality for any one it was for this dilapidated lover. Wits dubbed the pair Beauty and the Beast. He was regular at her toilet *levées*, which were attended by all the fine sparks in the city, beamed her to the toyshops, where she spent vast sums on pagods and carved monsters (where she got her money from none could tell. The enemy said his Grace’s purse was always open to her, but that was scandal); to the masquerades, to the gambling-table. Yes, the gambling-table, for our heroine has become a proselyte to the popular religion; and has moreover enrolled herself in the vast army of “Demireps of Quality.” As in this my old age I look back with rheumy eyes from a virtuous reign to one quite the contrary, how I could moralise over that army of Demireps! How I could air my wisdom and indite an improving sermon on this text! But I remember that old men are verbose by nature and that young ones lack respect for garrulity, and so I content myself with observing

that the strange anomaly a Demirep was a lady of fashion who aped the manners of one who—well, who was much beloved for a short time by her young brothers and male cousins. Her want of modesty was styled guileless freedom, for was she not of noble birth? She stood on the extremest verge of reputation, tottered on the brink of infamy, was hooted by the rabble with pungent epithets—and gloried in it! And sometimes—strangest thing of all—was really innocent of aught but seeming.

A Demirep employed a male domestic at her toilet; received young rakes by dozens (there is safety in numbers) as she reclined in bed in an elegant disorder; talked of the last sermon with artistically ruffled night-rail, of politics as by help of a hand-mirror she adjusted a new patch. The closer she approached the brink the more skittish did she affect to become, speaking of herself as Chloe, of her spark as Damon, attiring herself as a rouged shepherdess, and waving a gilt crook. Lady Grizel, whose pranks out-chloed Chloe, chose to set herself up as a leader of Demireps, although herself unmarried, wherein she broke down another barrier 'twixt ladies of rank and the lowest of the sex, and brought down on herself from the mob thereby the very cruelest invectives. Then was she delighted. On such occasions she would beard the rabble with fearless delight, and laugh the louder the harder were their words. One day, however,

she went too far. The maid of honour and her Grace of Ancaster (that Duke, weary of waiting, had at last married the second Miss Gunning) determined to visit a noted conjurer who dwelt in the purlieus about Southwark, and, to make the adventure the more piquant, the two donned male attire. Nothing could have looked more charming than did the pair of belles in full coats with wired skirts, boots to the knee, and dapper little swords. On the way a whim took Lady Grizel to enter a low tavern. Some sailors were there who, detecting the sex of the new-comers by their feet, insisted upon kissing the pretty delinquents. The Duchess of Ancaster submitted with a wry face ; not so my Lady Grizel, who with flashing eye and distended nostril drew a pistol from her pocket, swearing with a string of the great oaths with which ladies of fashion garnished their talk, that he who dared to lay a finger on her would be a dead man. Thus baulked, the sailors prepared for more serious outrage, when, happily for the ladies, two broad-backed fellows elbowed through the throng, who turned out to be Jasper and Sim Ames.

The Princess looked grave when she heard of the escapade, and Lord Bute cleared his throat for a lecture, but Lady Grizel slapped him with all her might upon his noble back, and tripped to her own apartment ere he recovered from the shock of her temerity.

The astute tutor, Mr. Stone, studied her to no purpose. The riddle of her conduct was beyond his deciphering—and are not all complex female characters beyond the superficial puzzling of man? Yet he seemed to hold the clue. He had seen her married secretly on a certain starlit night to a young soldier who from that moment vanished. His regiment was shortly after ordered abroad, and commenced a series of wanderings like those of Israel in the desert. There' was no rest for its foot, whose shoe, unlike Israel's, wore out apace. Stone tried once or twice to sound her by skilfully leading to the subject, in vain. He began even to think that he had been wrong in his assumption of her dislike for himself, for she treated him with marked civility, even invited him directly to her toilet, which was singular, for all the world knew that he was the enemy of her mistress the Princess.

She sought, too, for the friendship of Lady Gladys, with less success. The second maid of honour was shocked at her loose ways and horrified at her wild freaks. Each time the royal household went to Bath, Stone made it his business to inquire after Parson Ames, who lived in clover in his parsonage, ruled with a rod of iron by his wife—happy though, nathless—for there was no more of scraping empty pockets for stray pence; no more dirt to swallow at the bidding of that exacting master, hunger. He could be asked to tie no more

illicit knots ; for in 1753 marriages of the Fleet kind were finally rendered impossible by the Lords assembled, who began to tremble lest their own high-bred daughters should follow the growing fashion of eloping with the footman. That chapter, then, was closed, and Parson Ames—a lamb washed in hyssop—could never be got to speak of his greasy Fleet note-books. Did he keep or destroy them on the formation of the new law ? One testimony he held at least of a certain event. Of that Stone was quite sure ; for Mrs. Hanmer on her death-bed revenged herself upon her niece (who had never forgiven her treachery) by solemnly placing the special book which contained her copy of the register in the hands of the man who tied the knot. Mrs. Hanmer loved the Honourable Jack for some private reason of her own. By marrying him to the maid of honour she marred instead of making him. Hence a special spite against her niece, of which Mr. Stone made up his mind to take advantage, should occasion ever offer.

Now Stone had promised himself all those years ago to lead the little prince, his pupil, by the nose, to subjugate his mamma, and make of his future king a puppet in his own hands. But events had so far scarcely justified the hope, although the buccaneer Bishop, his colleague, was become quite his doll. Rendered suspicious by a long series of cabals, the Princess Dowager learned to dread the dark

tutor as a dangerous person, who was a spy of his patron's, the Duke of Newcastle—an enemy in the camp of Leicester House—and who, moreover, was striving to undermine her influence with her own son.

“What a wretch !” cried out the fluttering hen in the sympathetic ear of my Lord Bute ; “he must be ousted. He will teach George bad ways and to disrespect his dear mamma. He is a bosom friend, too, of that dreadful Mr. Wilkes, that dissolute, notorious reprobate.”

Which was true enough, and the gay gentleman—Colonel Wilkes, now of the Bucks militia—was not celebrated, it must be admitted, for good morals. His pranks at Medmenham Abbey caused pious people to shudder ; his highly-coloured stories, once in the green-room at Drury Lane, sent a virtuous harlequin and a decorous ballet well-nigh into fits. What a companion for Prince George's governor ! But how was this snake which the luckless Princess had fostered in her bosom to be scotched ? The Duke of Newcastle was paramount at court. Stone would not willingly resign his post. A secret battle over the boy's body began between mother and tutor with veiled claws. They smiled sweetly and purred in public ; but oh ! what venom there was behind !

Stone in his cunning resolved that in the event of the machinations of the Princess against him being successful, of which the danger was remote, it would

be as well to have a tool in the centre of the enemy's camp. To this end he was determined to tie the maid of honour to his service by some means or other; whether by threats or cajolery mattered little. During all these years he had been intending to strike a blow, to let the wild lady feel that he held her like a little fluttering bird within his palm, and—there being no cause for hurry—had postponed the decisive moment. But now (just as we take up the thread of our chronicle again) Mr. Stone has heard bad news; for young Prince George, grown by this time into a tall stripling, informed his tutor not an hour since that his mother had laid a formal complaint against him before the King. There was no time to be lost; the Lords and Commons were debating about a separate establishment for the young Prince of Wales, and it would never do for the tutor to find his pupil's door slammed in his face. It was artless in the boy to warn him, but then he was such a goose! Lady Grizel, as a fellow-conspirator, must know the details of every plot hatched at Leicester House; for the future it must be her business to tell all to Mr. Stone.

The *entr'acte* has been a long one; meanwhile I have been feeding you with mouldy old cakes and fossil oranges in the pit. Do not shuffle your feet—oh my grandchildren—and be so impatient. Remember that the players have had to change their clothes, that new scenery has been run out of the

grooves, that the candles had to be snuffed, that the gawdy gentlemen in the footmen's gallery required a few minutes at the tavern. Now all is ready again. The actresses shake out their skirts and blow their noses. Ting-a-ting! Up flies the curtain. The scene is my Lady Grizel's dressing-room, and she is at her toilet. A vastly fine piece of stage-painting truly. Hush! The play proceeds.

My Lady Grizel sits before her glass in a ravishing *deshabille* sipping a dish of tea, unconscious of threatening trouble; while Mr. Stone, perfectly neat and trim as is his custom, displays his glittering tusks and sharpens for the snowy bosom a dart which he knows will go straight home. He poises it while she calmly sips, fearful of no weapon. The talk is of a great fête at Ranelagh which is fixed for this very night, and the lady discusses the details of his costume with the old Duke of Tewkesbury, who sighs at her command to go as Friar Tuck. Poor infatuated gentleman! So tightly snared is he that he would even go in wings and roses as a wrinkled old Cupid with a bow and arrows if his charmer so ordered him. There is much interest in high quarters about this particular fête, for public opinion vows it will put down these masquerades as sinful, an impertinence which it behoves the quality one and all to resent at once by appearing at Ranelagh in fancy dress. The Princess Dowager and my Lord Bute have promised to be there, like-

wise the flower of the aristocracy, and the army of Demireps. There will be fiddling, and fireworks, and sandwiches, and sour wine, and water-works—delightful prospect! But more delicious still, the Methodists threaten to smite all persons daring to appear in masquerading habit, the bloods and sparks promise to arm their chairmen, and the Demireps look forward to quite an exciting evening. It is possible that the hangman will have hard work upon the morrow. Lady Grizel has spent at least twenty minutes in wheedling Mr. Pitt into accompanying her, for Mr. Pitt yet believes in the Beautiful and Good in spite of the maid of honour's escapades, but on this occasion he is adamant, smiling his sad smile fondly at her.

“No, no, my-Lady Madcap!” he said, rising to leave her levée; “no junketing for dull people such as I and my brother Grenville here. Whatever you choose to wear you are certain to look charmingly. What would the people think of me were I to join the band of Comus? Besides I feel that these poor Methodists are in the right if unduly violent. If his Grace of Tewkesbury is to beau your ladyship to Ranelagh, I would recommend him to see to his retainers. It would never do for the fairest of the fair to be torn to pieces by a mob! England is passing through a crisis. You would have done better to linger on with the Electress.”

“I fear no mob!” cried Lady Grizel in scorn,

taking a dainty pair of pistols from a drawer, and caressing them in her firm white hand. "I always go about armed, and care not who knows it."

"You will have more to fear from your own worshippers if you drive them to despair," grinned Mr. Stone. "Since poor Miss Ray was shot by her lover in Drury Lane it is dangerous to trifle with the sparks."

"True," agreed George Grenville, taking up his hat to follow Mr. Pitt. "The Duchess of Bolton goes in fear of her life, so enamoured is some stranger of her, and I hear that only last night the niece of Reynolds, the painter, was threatened by two bloods."

"Is there then no safety in numbers?" laughed Lady Grizel.

"Best to make sure of one," whispered Stone, leaning over her chair. "Come, now! among friends—why not have mercy on the poor Duke here who hath languished after you for ages? Why not make him happy? You can have no reason."

Lady Grizel looked him straight in the face, and laid down her cup quietly.

"Why not, indeed!" she echoed. "I may take him some day and embitter his last years—with your kind permission, good Mr. Stone." This with a deep reverence.

“It is accorded, madam!” returned Stone with mock dignity.

“I know no reason for withholding my consent, nor you neither I should think. By the way, Mr. Pitt, as paymaster of the forces, who should know the movements of the army better than your honour? Is the regiment wherein serves Mr. Bellasis returned at last to England? I thought to have seen him in the street to-day.”

“It is, at last,” smiled Mr. Pitt. “His Grace of Newcastle is in such a fright at the turn things are taking that he revokes his orders fifty times a day. Invasion! The French will never dare invade us. ’Tis but a blind to mask more serious designs; but he is always to be caught in the simplest trap.”

“It’s an ill wind that blows no one good,” returned the tutor. “What a singularly nomad life the young man has led. He is to visit Ranelagh to-night dressed as a runner. We shall all be glad to look on him again, shall we not, madam?”

“Very!” acquiesced Lady Grizel calmly. “Now, gentlemen, you must retire, as I have a host of things to do. Your servant, Mr. Pitt. Your Grace will meet me just within the gate of Ranelagh dressed as Friar Tuck. Go and obey.”

All withdrew—Stone last, who was mystified, but sanguine of success. That woman was a marvel, and capable of anything. She had received his dart without the quiver of an eyelid. However, this

stroke must bring matters to a head and force her to show her hand. She could not but perceive plainly now that he held the secret of her imprudence. How would she behave to him in the future? Upon that he would mould his plans. Whether she declared for peace or war signified nothing, for in either case he held her captive. If it was to be peace she must play the spy as price of his silence. If she attempted war, he would speak to her openly, pointing out that he had but to turn Ames upon her to set free an avalanche of ruin, and so, by gentle coercion, nip such folly as revolt. Yes, he held his spy well bitted and bridled, he reflected complacently as he moved through the apartment and remarked the elegant trifles strewn about. Whence could she obtain her income for such lavish expenditure? A very mysterious and wonderful woman!

Lady Grizel sat alone by the tea-table, moving the cups and saucers in her strong fingers like battalions against an enemy whom she saw in her mind's eye and frowned upon.

"War!" she muttered slowly, "war to the knife then if he will have it so. This tutor must be mad to dream of measuring his sword with mine. He fired the first shot. On his head then be the consequence. He knows of that fatal folly—how? Has Ames betrayed me? If to him why not to another, to all the world. Yet Deborah loves me,

and would never let her husband blab, of that I am sure. Oh that 'twere over!" she groaned impatiently. "For nine years have I schemed to keep that man in banishment. I have set fire to the old Duke's jealousy, that his influence too might be thrown into the scale. And he is back at last, and we must come face to face! All these webs spun in vain. We must meet—perhaps to-night at Ranelagh. To-night! Why not? 'Twere best to meet at once. Or shall I throw up the game and go abroad to the Electress? She promised a safe asylum should I ever be in trouble."

She rose and paced the room in perplexed thought, while her large supple hands moved one over the other. Presently she stopped before a mirror. Those stony eyes, shaded by straight brows, might have belonged to a Medusa—so might the set corners of the haggard mouth and the finely modelled chin. Late hours and an unending round of wildest dissipation had robbed her of her roses. That stern white face might have been marble, so might the shapely hands with long square fingers and firmly-developed thumbs. The image of a woman who, if goaded, would stick at nothing. As she thought, her face brightened; the Medusa look made way for the bold roguish smile which so bewitched the sparks, and she laughed as she bared her bosom.

"Ancaster will enjoy the conceit amazingly," she said aloud, "for this is wilder than the Sailor's

Tavern. A bold stroke! But this is no moment for half measures. The smooth-faced boy used to be starched enough. What is he like now? I must shock him at first sight of me, and that may be difficult. The beaux take so much to shock them nowadays!" she sighed; then the laugh died away and she looked very wicked.


"What will *he* think of me—Mr. Pitt, the good and pure? What matters it what any think of me? I am bad through no sin of mine, and will be worse, and will proclaim it too, lest this penniless soldier should claim me as his wife. That is the first step—to prevent his wishing to possess me. A soldier's wife!—I, to whom luxury is second nature, with twins stuffed into my hood as I trudge behind the drum! Never, never, never! How much doth the tutor know? And what of Ames? If he takes to blabbing I must even get that register into my own possession or clever Mr. Stone will be playing me a trick. Vain idiot! He presumes to show me his cards at starting, just as though he were certain of his game! I will write to Deborah to-morrow."

Ringling for her woman, Lady Grizel assumed her sauciest look and turned her attention to the grave business of preparing for the masquerade.



CHAPTER IX.

THE MASQUERADE AT RANELAGH.

T was a fine evening in opening summer which was to see the world of fashion defile in masquerade. The *ridotto al fresco* had been carefully arranged to commence as soon after early dinner as possible, in order that the delights thereof—the fireworks, gossip, and collation—might be well over ere the Princess Dowager departed to another fête (a night one this) given by her friend the buccaneer Bishop, at his Fulham villa—a fête to which all the quality were bound to follow her. There was another reason for commencing at six o'clock, namely, the insolently angry attitude of the lower orders, who were rabid for the moment with religious mania. If heads were to be broke, 'twere better that such work should be done ere nightfall, for it is ill scuffling with staves and paving-stones in the dark.

The dangers of the road to Chelsea, independent of ruts and holes, were great at all times. The long stone wall which divides Piccadilly from the Green Park is a famous lurking-place for foot-pads, whilst the blear-eyed hostelry yclept Hercules' Pillars, which stands at Hyde Park Corner, was (as it still is as I write) a noted place of rendezvous for ill-looking grooms, and graziers, and collectors on the highway. About the benches and riding-blocks, behind the great granite watering-trough, might always be seen lolling, big, strong-backed men of coarse appearance and idle mien, whose tawdry tinselled coats (with maybe a mask or pistol peeping from a pocket) spoke eloquently of their profession. These men would yawn and sprawl and dabble their clothes with drink for hours together, blinking with bloodshot vision at the passers-by, then, on a signal, toss down a guinea for their reckoning, and yelling for their horses, ride away. At night it was a matter of great risk to pass along that road, for though lamps were slung at intervals on ropes over the thoroughfare, they creaked unlit save when the moon was veiled, and when 'twas cloudiest were oftentimes found by a marvelling watchman lying broken in the mud, their ropes severed in malice with a knife.

On this fine evening there was little danger from such a source. Advertisements had been largely circulated announcing that a strong bodyguard was

retained to protect the road from London to Chelsea; but so great was the crowd of vehicles—chairs, chaises, coaches, chariots—bumping one against the other; so deafening the hubbub of screaming postilions, runners, chairmen, that no highwayman would have been bold enough to show his face *professionally*. Gentlemen of the road there were of course in plenty, mingling with the quality; ogling the baubles of the ladies and making notes thereanent for future practice. Indeed many of the brotherhood were moving sedately towards Ranelagh in masquing garments, for it was no uncommon thing for a seeming nobleman to dance and sup there with an unknown belle, and having in amorous dalliance surveyed her trinkets, to retire and meet her later in another character with the ungallant order to stand and to deliver them.

The road to Chelsea presented the aspect of a fair. Midway lurched a surging swaying mass of gilded vehicles; on either side a crowd poured in and out of the alehouses with scowls and drunken curses at the glittering stream. Yet so far no violence was offered. “Hard words break no bones,” saith the adage; so the quality moved along in their motley clothes smirking at the mob, who shook grimy fists in their perfumed faces, and vulgarly swore at them. Quacks and vendors of patent drugs elbowed in and out, crying: “Medicines

good against an earthquake—buy, buy!” Sellers of fans, gloves, powder boxes, calling: “What do ye lack?” Beggars there were in swarms with false ulcers and hideous counterfeit sores—and genuine cripples marked with the badge of Cambridge—idiots racked and wrung with pains, ejected probably as useless and harmless from the Fleet. Lazarus brushed Dives with his sodden cloak, and rouged and raddled Dives with a leer passed on. At one spot a crowd was gathered round two hags who, half-naked, battered each other’s pulpy features. A man on a barrel waved a great placard which informed the lieges that Bruising Peg and Polly Hyfield were fighting for a new chemise, each bound to hold a new half-crown in either fist lest they should be tempted to use the orthodox weapons of the sex—their nails. Farther on a man with inflamed visage set up a portable pulpit, and tossing a Bible in the air commenced a frenzied discourse on the chances of Eternal Life. “That,” he shouted, pointing to the illumined rotunda of Ranelagh, which, like the enchanted palace of a genio, rose against the darkling sky out of a dust-cloud; “That is the Devil’s Den! It shall not stand three days. I, a new Joshua, will blow a trumpet and it shall fall. Woe to it, and to the sinners who resort there! As Sodom was destroyed so shall it crumble, for where amongst them all may a handful of just men be found to save this

city from destruction? Nay! ye are yourselves as bad every whit," he raved in sudden wrath, for a malapert lad was pinching of his leg, "a drunken roysterer disrespectful crew! Ye too shall burn! Before three days there shall be another shock! The rocks shall split, the earth shall gape! Thou brawny bestial sinner there, repent while there is time! The spirit moveth me——"

A carter who stood by and objected to finding himself thus suddenly reviled, raised his hand, and the preacher, bending to avoid a blow, overbalanced himself and toppled over amid general applause.

"The *spirit* moveth him too much methinks," grinned the carter, "for in truth he is exceeding drunk."

A shower of dirt and stones fell on the pate of the holy man, who, gathering up his tattered Bible and smashed pulpit, slunk away, declaring that God gives up the sons of Belial to the hardness of their hearts.

No one cares what becomes of him, for there is a spirit of ruffianism stalking abroad to-night. The people suspect something—what, they cannot say. It is generally known that ten ships of the line have been despatched some weeks since, under Admiral Byng, a carpet officer, to save the British islands in the Mediterranean from the greedy maw of France. It is also known that his ships were mere hulks, rotted and encrusted with barnacles. It is more-

over surmised that the French squadron, which sailed fully a fortnight before Byng's, was provisioned for two months only, and could not therefore be destined for America. Was it likely that British ghost-ships could cope with the taut-trimmed vessels of the French admiral? Was Minorca to fall then—and Gibraltar? Was England no more to stand as a nation before Europe? The people suspected a new disaster, and manifold experience taught them to gauge such a thing pretty correctly when it came. Couriers had been seen flying in and out of the Duke of Newcastle's dwelling. This meant something unusual. Yet here were all the lords and ladies parading in red and blue and yellow, like mountebanks, when mayhap their country was bleeding from a fresh wound. But the lordlings thought more of hair-powder than of gun-powder. Was it a wonder that the mob were inflamed with rage?

See! The attention of the crowd is drawn from the discomfited preacher to a hubbub round a chair. The quick eye of a weaver from Spitalfields has detected the figure of a lady within wrapped in a drapery of unmistakable French silk, and he calls on the people to make an example of her. Led by vague suspicions, the ire of the commonalty has risen within the last few hours above its accustomed watermark. They mutter darkly of sacking the house of the Prime Minister, of making a bonfire of

French cooks and valets; but a mob without a definite leader is greater at words than deeds till some trivial circumstance supplies the required need and sets the seething mass ablaze.

Nearly all the nobility wore French silk daily, although the weavers had petitioned for an embargo in its importation; yet no one had attempted to dictate upon the subject until now, when an ill-conditioned weaver idly pointed out an unprotected woman as a scapegoat. With one accord the people stopped the chair, forced the chairmen to raise the lid and open the door; and bade bedizened madam to come forth.

The lady rose, crossed her arms, and wrapped the obnoxious silken folds about her tall figure. The crowd waited a moment, half-terrified at its own audacity, for she spoke not nor left the chair. At length one bolder than the rest took off his tobacco-scented periwig and dashed it in her face out of revenge for accumulated insults from her order. "French silk! French carmine on her cheeks, too, no doubt!" he sneered. Her mask fell off, revealing the white lineaments and the Medusa eyes of Lady Grizel. A murmur of involuntary admiration went round the circle, followed by a movement of vexation at her stubborn attitude.

"The baggage looks on us like dogs!" observed a man in a riding-coat who eyed her jewels longingly.

“It’s the daughter of Earl Gowering, and maid of honour to her Highness,” cried another.

“A brave maid of honour—a brazen slut!” scoffed a third. “Let us bear her to Bridewell to pick hemp among her fellows!”

A trembling little old woman with ashen-grey face and blanched hair pushed eagerly forward on hearing the name, and peered with a wild scowl at Lady Grizel—a repulsive hag in a mud-draggled petticoat and frayed capuchin.

The maid of honour, who confronted the crowd with a smile of contempt, quailed before those searching eyes, which glowed like coals from beneath their shaggy penthouses.

“Why do you stare at me?” she asked, with suspicious doubt. “Have I ever seen you before?”

“I have longed through years to look upon Lord Gowering’s daughter,” murmured the crone. “Some time we shall meet again, and one or other may rue that meeting.”

And she vanished in the crowd.

Lady Grizel looked after her. A chill foreboding gathered round her heart; then, shaking off such superstitious nonsense, and rousing her energies to present danger, she cried in a clear voice:

“Are ye men to see a woman of quality thus wantonly insulted? Take the staves from out my chair and beat me down this sludge!”

She looked like a marbled Nemesis in her white

silk wrapper, as she pointed with imperial finger at the mob. Nay, she might have been the stern Goddess Anagke herself, clad in the mystic crown and drapery of the Inevitable; for a diadem of brilliants was all that could be seen of her masquing dress from out her mufflings.

The ring of her sonorous accents brought a horseman to her side, who might have ridden on had she not spoken; an olive-complexioned gentleman with features as resolute as her own, who was festively clad in moray and silver, and who wore a blue domine fluttering from his shoulders.

“Grizel!” he said hurriedly. “Always in trouble! Always at bay before a mob. You love to drag your ’scutcheon in the dust. The Lily seems to rejoice in sullyng its purity.”

The crowd recoiled, uncertain how to act. This scene, which takes some time in its relation, passed in the twinkling of an eye. The preacher was over-set, the chair stopped and opened in fewer seconds than it takes words to tell of it. The stream welling towards Ranelagh was checked for a moment; the sparks who were on the *qui vive* rallied quickly round the lady with drawn swords, and a general *mêlée* seemed inevitable, when another rider forced his horse towards the chair and whispered to the first:

“Jasper! come away! No Ranelagh for us to-night. Sir John Fielding and his crew are coming

up, bent on making a raid among the masks in search of members of our craft. The tipstiffs will call on each man to doff his vizard. This in defence of the unusual profusion of jewellery about. He must not find us there. Come! Old Hannah is ahead. To Sot's Hole, away!"

Jasper, seeing his sister well protected, took a purse from his breast and passed it to her.

"You may need money," he said in an undertone, and, putting spurs to his horse, galloped, scattering the crowd to right and left, in the direction the old crone had taken, followed closely by Sim Ames.

Scarcely were they gone than the chief-magistrate clattered up with the patrol at his heels and a score of flurried tipstiffs. The mob wavered and broke in confusion, whilst my Lady Grizel resumed her seat as though naught had happened, and was carried in triumph into Ranelagh past another preacher, who from his vantage of a heap of stones, called frantically on her to flee from the wrath to come.

The modish pleasure-garden presented a rare sight this evening in the gloaming, for the great central rotunda, wherein dancing had already commenced, looked, with its many lights, like a giant's lantern, while the long shady alleys by Thames Bank glittered with a thousand tiny oil-lamps, as though an army of glow-worms were skimming among the branches. A band of picked musicians discoursed sweet music within the larger building,

whilst, for the delectation of such persons of quality as preferred the open air, a wooden pavilion had been erected in the centre of the big pond, in which were established a harpsichord and some violins for the accompanying of Tenducci and Farinelli, who warbled their masterpieces at intervals. Boats, too, with nodding transparencies flitted on the pond like troops of fireflies, with ravishing effect. All was glitter and noise and jollity. Hundreds of masks displayed the delicate fancy of their costumes on the broad avenues, accosting each other blithely with impurest jest, or noisome joke, or stinging repartee. For nothing was judged too gross for female ears so long as the lady wore her vizard. What did it matter what was said to her when no one could say whether she blushed or not? Hence there was reason for the diatribes of Wesley and of Whitefield, who never wearied of preaching, that of all engines devised by a corrupt generation to foster vice, the masquerades were the greatest, because that they deprived virtue of her last refuge—*shame*—which keeps even hardened sinners within bounds of decency after the ties of principle and conscience have been loosened.

Truly the revelries of Ranelagh (which their present decorous Majesties have abolished for ever) were a burning disgrace to the nobility of George II. Yet now I reflect on the matter it would have been best to strike at the root of the evil—the *mask*—

without which no lady of fashion went abroad. A modish madam would have been deemed indecent who went to the play unmasked. Yet if she had sat in a box open to the observation of the house, sure no actor or actress would have dared speak the words set down for them. But aristocratic dames, by concealing their faces, tacitly announced that they were ready to hear anything, and the same principle which was recognised within the theatre was accepted in the garden or the street. Beaux tripping on the Mall knew the Lady Jane, though she wore a vizard, by the emblems on her chair-panels, and told her such stories as, had her face been bare, would have ensured a crossing of swords with a brother or a cousin afterwards. But her face was masked. The libertine of the moment, by an accepted quibble, knew not to whom he spoke, and so was free to instil ideas at pleasure, which—well, well—*O tempora ! O mores !*

The favourite resort of Ranelagh was not calculated to improve the morals of a not too squeamish aristocracy. Husbands and wives went thither without faces to practise their amours, nor were they fearful of detection, for it was the custom to change habits in one or other of the boxes surrounding the rotunda many times during an evening, so that any one set on to watch would easily be thrown off the scent. Ah me ! How few cared to watch. On common ground, where no one had a face, all met

on an equal footing. Seven shillings and sixpence having been paid at the door, no prying questions were asked. Here ladies of rank met their highwaymen lovers, whose criminal relations gave a last filip to their jaded appetites. Here giddy young women made the acquaintance of the vilest of the vile, who cozened them into tripping despite themselves. Once when Sir John Fielding made one of his raids in search of sharpers, the doors were barricaded against him by general consent, till a solemn promise was exacted that no female present should be compelled to show her face. Looking back from this day to that which was, I am again compelled in my garrulity to cry, *O tempora ! O mores !*

The throng increased till the broad walk was almost impassable. There was her lively Grace of Ancaster, looking as demure as she could in the habit of a nun; her Grace of Bolton (lovely Miss Fenton) as a quakeress; the notorious Mother Needham (limned in the Harlot's Progress) as a vestal virgin; the equally infamous Mother Shuster as Diana. A fat wagoner in a satin smock was no other, it was whispered, than the Duke of Cumberland, victor of Culloden. The Lady Gladys appeared as Melpomene, muse of tragedy, in robes borrowed from Mrs. Siddons. Her sweet pensive face was, every one vowed, the very picture of elegant affliction, and vastly entertaining. But a dancing corpse in a shroud alarmed many, specially such as

believed in the long sleep without a waking. The coffin on his back had white ornamental handles, while on the breastplate was inscribed :

“Mortals, attend ! This pale and ghastly spectre,
Three months ago, was plump and stout as Hector !
Oh ! shun harmonic rout and midnight revel
Or you and I will soon be on a level.”

It was a vulgar, ill-bred conceit, for it pointed a churchyard moral, and there were wags abroad who spread a report that this was Lady Huntingdon, or Wesley, or Whitefield, who, weary of vain preaching, had come to terrify the quality into better manners. But this was idle scoffing, for Wesley and Whitefield were at that moment droning in concert far away, for the spiritual edification of Lady Huntingdon as she dosed over a stocking.

Lady Grizel walked feverishly up and down on the arm of Friar Tuck as though expecting to see some one. People knew her by her diamonds (who paid for them ?), and playfully joked about her long white wrapper.

“A rival ghost !” they said. “Go borrow a coffin from the dancing corpse.”

But she laughed her most metallic laugh, declaring that her dress was the most becoming of all to a pretty woman, if a trifle summery for the open air. When we go to sup presently in the great hall you shall look on it in its perfection. Till then, patience !

At last she saw the man she was expecting—for, being a woman, of course she was expecting a man. He was clad in the picturesque jacket and short silken petticoat weighted with bullion fringe which characterised the “runner” or running footman of his day. His sunburnt face was bare, for he swung his mask in hand as though expecting to be recognised. Lady Grizel hurried her faithful old Duke to the rotunda.

What a glare of light! What a delicious lulling sense of drowsy warmth laden with incense and cloying perfume! What an exhilarating burst of noble music as the orchestra blared forth the solemn strains of Mr. Handel’s march from “Scipio!”

Lady Grizel, tossing off her wrapper, advanced with queenly stride into the centre of the vast hall, removing her vizard that there might be no doubt of her identity. At the same moment the Princess Dowager made her entrance on Lord Bute’s arm by an opposite door, and all the occupants of the tiers of boxes rose up respectfully to receive her.

She started back, muttering “*C’est trop fort !*” as her eye rested on her pet maid of honour, while the running footman staggered and turned deadly pale. Not so the Lily. She stood and curtsied with a triumphant pirouette, choosing to take to the success of her own appearance the general homage of the company. Her blue eyes flashed with unusual lustre; her roses suddenly returned; a saucy

movement of her full ripe lips displayed a dazzling row of pearly teeth. People (especially the men) cried out at the ravishing spectacle. So glorious a figure they had none of them beheld—nor so much of one in public neither. For it is the painful duty of a repentant grandsire to inform his better-educated grandchildren that the Lady Grizel—the strange vicissitudes of whose career he has undertaken to relate—wore a classic skirt of embroidered muslin, and golden sandals, and a diadem of brilliants, and costly bracelets and armlets and necklaces, and a filmy veil, and—VERY LITTLE ELSE BESIDES!!

The old Duke, whose morals were sadly battered by rubbing against the vices of his age, was intoxicated with delight and wonder, and sighed when the Princess hastily threw over the shoulders of her favourite her own mantle, which my Lord Bute proceeded gravely to pin up.

“Iphigenia adorned for the sacrifice, madam!” observed Lady Grizel with a demure curtsy, and a toss of her head at the running footman.

“More like Eve not adorned at all!” spitefully cried Lady Gladys, whose half-healed wounds were reopened by the sight of those two so long parted brought together face to face.

Mr. Bellasis made an effort to recover himself and bowed stiffly, though his colour returned not.

“*Tiens! Le petit lieutenant!*” said Lady Grizel,

carelessly holding out her hand—purposely the left hand on which, nine years ago, he had placed the ring. “Come back alive! I thought you dead long since in some horrid swamp.”

He bowed again and his lips moved, and a hoarse sound issued thence, while Lady Gladys looked on amazed.

“Duke!” cried the spoilt beauty. “Go and see about supper in the royal box. We will have minced chicken in a china dish, stewed over a lamp with butter and water. I am engaging at a stew! Go! and cream and strawberries for the returned prodigal. Sure, madam! you will invite Mr. Bellasis since he is still alive?”

By this time all the beaux had gathered round her and were buzzing like a hive of lively bees—their wits brightened for a time by the pleasing galvanic shock she had prepared for them.

Throughout supper, none so bubbling with mirth as she. His Grace of Tewkesbury was in huge delight, holding the lamp with a Spartan disregard for burnt fingers, over which she stirred the mess as she rattled and bandied witticisms with the beaux till the Princess expected the platter each moment about her ears.

“Mek aist! Put on a decent gown!” she said. “The Pishob will be expecting us at Fulham, and it will be gold upon de river.”

His Grace of Tewkesbury offered his coach.

“No, no!” said the royal lady. “The igh-road is dangerous mit your horrid thieves. I prefer water, and our barge is waiting.”

The Honourable Jack marked her words. They were all going to the Bishop’s fête, which was sure not to break up till daylight. He too would go there, and force an explanation from his wife. During weary years he had been kept in exile through some fatality; had pondered over watch-fires whilst his comrades slept—of how and when he should meet that wife again. His lovely wife from whom he had parted almost at the chapel-door! How he had since blamed himself—weak, prim, well-meaning young man—for the selfish trick which wrecked her, promising himself to wash out that treachery by the devotion of a life! How liberal are all weak, prim young men in promises. What a meeting and what a disenchantment! The Lady Grizel had never moved a finger to push his fortunes as Mrs. Hanmer led him to expect she would, and he felt that her coldness was a just judgment on his conduct. He was still a penniless younger son. Vainly he had implored his brother to do something for him, to get him transferred to a regiment at home; but my Lord Bellasis was too much engrossed with wine and whist to attend to such a trifle as a brother, and so he had remained in exile. His wife never once wrote to him or recognised his existence by a sign. He never dared write to her,

for it had been settled that their secret was to be kept till the dawn of a happier day. And now that he saw her at last, she was more beautiful than ever, with a lurid hellish beauty, and depraved—oh! how depraved! Sunk to the lips in the mire of her time. As degraded in his eyes as the lowest of her sex. A pang shot through his strait-laced selfish heart as the inward monitor whispered that he was perhaps himself answerable for the change. Yet no! Surely she never could have learned the secret of the stolen letters. Mrs. Hanmer, for her own sake, of course took care of that. No! He would not admit even to the monitor that the awful transformation could be his own work. He would carefully study her and see whether the appearance might not be worse than the reality. Yes, he would follow the royal party to Fulham and watch.

So Mr. Bellasis sat in a corner during supper, staring with lack-lustre eyes, and woke as from a nightmare when she suddenly jerked the steaming mess under his nose, bidding him mark how savoury it smelt.

Bewildered Lady Gladys clenched her hands tightly and strove to think. These two, who had robbed her existence of its sunlight, were come together after a separation of years to meet as strangers—as worse than strangers. For this was more than mere indifference. The Honourable Jack, a bronzed,

broad-chested hero now, looked at Lady Grizel with astonishment, and but half-concealed disgust; while, as for the latter, her conduct was inexplicable. Could it all have been a horrid dream? Could distempered fear have misled the erring testimony of her own eyes? Alas! surely not. The picture of the pair—so handsome and stately under the flicker of a candle in a parson's hat—was burnt into her eyeballs, seared upon her brain. They must be playing some lugubrious comedy. What could it mean? She too would wait and watch.



CHAPTER X.

ROSEMARY MEAD.



F you examine the chart of London as published at the sign of the Three Hats in Paternoster Row, you will observe that the villages to which the cits resort, either on business or pleasure bent, are divided from the mother city by miles of open country, intersected by wooded roads which are the favourite hunting-grounds of many a thief. It is no doubt annoying, if bound for Sadler's Wells or the pretty village of Chelsea, to have to ride in parties for fear of being robbed, or to be forced to put up at the Angel in Islington rather than push forward in the dark through the infested avenues; yet we must not grumble, for the city magistrates have done what they can to ensure safe journeying. They have fixed horse-patrols along the main arteries, and bands of foot, armed with hanger and blunder-

buss, about the cross-roads from Sadler's Gate to Tottenham Court Turnpike and Spa-fields. What more have we a right to ask? for it is our own fault if we travel unarmed. Yet have they even done more than this, for it is advertised in the daily prints, as all the world knows, that such of the nobility and gentry as entertain company at their suburban villas can hire a special patrol of eight men or more for the protection of their guests by application to Sir John Fielding.

Upon conning that chart you will remark that the course of the river between Chelsea reach and Hammersmith forms a promontory, dotted by few dwellings, and that the said promontory hath the aspect of a solitary island, bounded as it is by the high-road through Kensington to Hammersmith Ferry on the north, and by that from Chelsea across Walham Green on the east. This tract has obtained the name of Noman's Land because it leads nowhere, and has been claimed by none. Along the river-bank you may mark two isolated houses—Fulham Palace and the villa of the buccaneer Bishop, both protected by moats and lofty walls and palisades; but these are merely on the outskirts of Noman's Land, not of it, for they are usually approached by river, the roads which lead to them from Kensington and Chelsea being held too dangerous for ordinary traffic.

These roads are in some places mere bramble-

grown heaps of stones ; in others rude tracks of grass hewn clear of tangled brushwood, with holes and ruts yawning across or alongside, filled with foul water, abode of myriads of frogs. On either hand are neglected orchards of hoary apple and pear trees, planted in too liberal measure long ago ; for their branches are twined and matted together in close embrace, while the space about their feet is occupied by a thicket of gnarled currant bushes, which have forgotten the culture of their youth. These orchards again are topped by towering elms, more sparsely spread—home of raven and of hawk—which cast heavy shadows down on the smaller trees, making the gloom so dense that in certain spots your eye refuses to penetrate its depths more than a few yards. The solitude of these groves (away from the rough-hewn track) is so complete, broken only by hum of insect or cry of wild bird, that you might pitch your tent and inhabit them for years, and imagine yourself in the primeval forests of America the while ; for the two roads which struggle at a disadvantage against choking briars lead only, as I have said, to Fulham Palace and the Bishop's villa, and are but seldom used. There is a bridle-path diverging towards the river-bank on the north-west, which brings you to a more open space, known to such as it may concern as Rosemary Mead ; but it concerns few, those few being chiefly bargemen, who approach by water,

mooring their heavy-laden craft among the sedges while they land for an instant to moisten their throats with liquor at Sot's Hole. Sure none but men of blunted intelligence would land on that repulsive spot. It stands in a tiny creek at the bend of the stream, whose waters are apparently anxious to escape contamination with all speed, for they rush swiftly by, leaving a reeking bed of ooze, which has at most hours to be crossed on planks. Weeds and willows seem to die there under the influence of some occult poison. The air is heavy with a fetid savour of decaying vegetation, whilst at night a dense vapour envelops it in a chill winding-sheet, above which are seen glimmering by belated boatmen the tall spectral uprights of a riverside gibbet. It might be the haunt of a gang of murderers but for the presence of this gibbet, which, like a scarecrow, seems placed to warn them off.

Pleasure-parties returning citywards by moonlight shiver and falter in their glee or roundelay as they drift by, for on that gibbet are always hanging malefactors in chains, who creak and swing dismally in the night breeze to the accompaniment of ghostly moans as of souls in torment. Rann and Tom King, in their day the terror of the road, hang there a warning to 'prentice lads to beware of evil courses; not that those youngsters are likely to heed the warning, for all along Thames-bank from Hammersmith to Gravesend stand those

awful trees, and a lesson too oft repeated passeth through heedless ears.

At night time folks feel greater awe in drifting by this gallows than any other, for the groans and shrieks are certainly no work of the imagination. Which of us would not be terror-stricken on passing a moonlit corpse to seem to hear it complaining of its fate? So the dwellers at Sot's Hole are little disturbed by strangers save by such passing barge-men as may feel a desire by daylight to taste old Hannah's spirits, which are too pure to have affronted the excise.

Hannah's abode is under shadow of the gibbet, with its feet in the reeking slime. It consists of a low shambling cottage, built of boards, with a projecting roof like a verandah supported along the front by posts. Its windows, fashioned from rotten garden-frames, are stuffed, where needful, with rags, so that, what with the overhanging eave and the darkened casements, its wretched chambers may be said never to be gladdened by daylight. It contains three chambers, all on one floor, one of which is reserved for the sole use of its mistress, while the second is filled with mysterious stores, and the third set apart for her lodgers. For, strange as it may appear, this gruesome abode finds favour in the eyes of a select few. Gentlemen ride through the labyrinth which leads to it—bravely clad ones too, in velvet and gold lace. In the open

they picket their horses, which browse on the rank grass while their masters are busy within. Then they mount and ride away, or sometimes pass a night or two wrapped in their riding-cloaks in that third chamber at the back. Not often, though, for they all complain of the moaning which breaks their rest. Some of them, indeed, reckless gentry like Sim Ames, threaten to destroy the shed that stretches along the back of the dwelling; but then old Hannah rouses herself for an instant, and there is that in her eyes which causes them to laugh off her anger by saying they were joking.

There is a mystery about that long windowless shed, which is built up of strange odds and ends—old shutters of every shape and hue—red, dark green, light blue; faded, warped, blistered some by fire. There is horror about it, for from its recesses issue the groans which passers take for the complaining of Rann and of Tom King. Years ago a weird grey woman with bloodshot eyes, bent back, and distorted thumbs, came to this place and camped there. By night she lay unprotected in the fever-laden vapour, by day she sat under the gibbet greedily watching the faces of the swaying malefactors, striving to read in them some indications of prolonged agony after their souls' release. She watched them, holding her breath, lest by her presence she should interrupt the birds of the air that tore them piecemeal.

“Bravely done!” she croaked. “Bravely done!” But when at last the chains hung tenantless and the bleached bones of the dead strewed the rank herbage, she shook her head displeased. “Too soon,” she said regretfully. “Too soon!”

More fruit and more adorned her tree and vanished. Still she lived on, unstricken by fever, untouched by cold, crawling in bitterest frost into a kind of den, hollowed by her own hands like a burrow in the earth. Once a compassionate citizen who was fishing along the Thames accosted her and offered a shelter more fitting to one who seemed at least half human. But she turned on him with maniacal gestures and hissed out: “Let be! I have borne all anguish that man may bear and yet I live! I live for my revenge. That holds me scatheless. Mine is a charmed life. See these crippled thumbs, these great scars eaten by corroding iron on my legs. I have endured the thumbscrew till the blood burst like a fountain from my nails. I have been fixed in a collar on tiptoe before blazing coals till my skin cracked in fissures. And yet I live. Aye! and with a spike beneath my chin lest I should fall asleep—asleep! not yet. Those victims swinging there; why should I heed them? Have I not been shut in a vault for days with corpses which none cared to bury?”

The fisherman tried to escape, but the crone

seized him with fingers that were like birds' claws, and, her dormant energies roused by her own recital, continued in an awe-stricken whisper :

“Do you love to sit in city churchyards—do you? I do. It's brave to crouch in a deep open grave for warmth, and watch the diggers fade! Those who died to-day are packed beside those who perished yesterday, and Death, the king, slays all with unerring aim who dare approach too near. One swift sweep of his pickaxe and the intruder falls—oho!” The old woman went through the opening of a grave and the fall of the digger through miasma in elfish pantomime, and the honest cit wished himself miles beyond reach of this dreadful madwoman as he trembled—for it was too true that the city churchyards were indeed death-traps, and that relatives who had followed their dear ones to their long home were frequently brought back to share it in a day or two.

So the old woman lived in her burrow unmolested, and in course of time Rann and Tom King came in gaudiest garb to take their places on the tree. At sight of them the strands of her dishevelled intellect seemed to gather in a knot, for she had known the jolly blades in life. Lines of settled purpose formed round her wasted mouth; her bleared eyes were lit with a new fire. Instead of moping and croaking she resolved to do something. Daily she had poured forth her prayer of cursing, had un-

burthened her overcharged heart of its bitterness. Now she would actively show her hatred of the world which had broken her.

Gathering together her remaining shreds of reason, she took inspiration from Rann and King, disappeared for a short while, then returned with money, which she hid in the ground. Presently under her direction the wooden house took form, then the mysterious shed made of old shutters, and then commenced the moaning which so terrified the lieges. With her own hand she painted on the door of it, "This is ye Fleete," and inscribed in red below, "Here live Bambridge and Corbett, miscreants. When doth God will they should burn in Hell?" Of the cot she made a drinking-house (for none cared to disturb her usurpation), called it Sot's Hole, and soon the gentlemen in smart attire began to find it a convenient trysting-place. They looked on her as a harmless lunatic, whose mania was useful to them, for she was always ready quite hungrily to conceal booty, and oftentimes in her churchyard rambles picked up much useful information. It satisfied in some sort her craving for revenge to harbour highwaymen, for she felt with glee that by giving them facilities she was maturing them for the gallows. All men were her enemies; it was good that they should swing. The great object of life was to track Corbett and Bambridge some day to their death; meanwhile the longing to

inflict pain on something must be gratified. The creaking of the men already hanging, as they seemed to watch from a place of observation for the coming of more, was music to her ears; her manner became calm. She no longer cursed and raved, but seemed to bide her time. A stranger would hardly have remarked that she was mad, for she rarely spoke, and only woke from a forced kind of apathy at the mention of the one hated name of Bambridge. Then would she steal to the shed at the back and seem to lave in the sounds of suffering which issued thence, and feel the muzzles which sniffed and whined beneath the door, and sit rocking, rocking, for hours under shadow of the swinging highwaymen. She watched like a tigress over this mimic Fleet, bearing to the prisoners such scraps of offal as should keep their lives within them when her practised ear told that they were almost effecting an escape; and the gentlemen who frequented her dwelling, not being of an over-refined and delicate sort, permitted her to satisfy her singular fancy unheeded so long as she should continue to be useful.

When Jasper made his first essay on the road by relieving Lord Bute of a watch and twenty guineas he retired to Sot's Hole, there to await Sim Ames, who, having in his quality of postilion loudly bewailed the cruelty of robbers all the way to my lord's lodgings, there donned a riding-suit, and

hastened to rejoin his friend. Sim was full of compliments at the masterly proceeding of the neophyte, who had shouted "Stand and deliver!" as to the manner born; but the latter took no note of his pretty speeches, seeming satisfied in a grim sort of way at being launched, though there was mingled with his satisfaction an unaccountable shade of regret. Had the world treated him fairly he would have returned the compliment in kind, but the world had evilly entreated him, and it was his mission to defy the world to hourly combat. Yet was it not a pity that such warfare should be inevitable? If his wicked father, the late Lord Gowering, had only married his unknown mother how different it would all have been! But the sins of the fathers are visited on the children—a law which this son considered grievously unjust, so he made up his mind not only to fight the world, but to glory in so doing.

The ice once broken, then, he entered warmly into all Sim Ames's plans, inspiring the respect of that lively youth by his indomitable energy, personal prowess, and fertility of resource. But he was as wayward as a girl; one day mulcting a whole coachful single-handed, the next one gloomily musing of his inevitable fate; for like all "Collectors" he was perfectly aware that a noose was certainly awaiting him at the end of a vista of years more or less short. Then he muttered of the great name that should

have been his, of the blue blood which possibly might flow over a dissecting-table after his execution; and grinding his teeth swore by his dead mother's bones that his deeds should be such as to save him from Barber's Hall by achieving for him the distinction of being hung in chains. At such times he was so reckless as to communicate the terror of his resolves into the hearts of those whom he stopped. "Scratchpole," as he came to be called from a habit of tucking his long hair under his hat to aid disguise, was the dread of cits and of their better halves, who taught their children to pray for his capture till they came to consider him as a gigantic ogre who batted on child-pie.

Yet Jasper was an amazing medley of contradictory elements. At one moment fierce and hard, the next he became as tender in manner as a maiden—much more tender indeed than his beautiful sister ever was. The contemplation of mad old Hannah always filled him with ineffable pity, for who might gauge better than he the weight of suffering which had brought her to this shipwreck? Her sorrow had apparently been kindred with, but more poignant than, his own, and his face wore its sternest look as he passed her mimic prison. When something roused her dormant anguish to the surface, and her racked frame shivered, and her clasped hands were wrung together, he would carry her like an infant in his strong arms and lay her on her

homely couch. The magnetic influence of his touch always calmed her at once, and as his cool hand rested on her brow she would sink into a dreamless sleep. So it came about that she followed him like a tame dog wistfully looking in his eyes for orders, and some of the others in a fit of humanity bade him command her to abolish her prison. But then his face would stiffen, and he would say coldly "No!" He had imbibed from her some weird fancy that those whose names had been adopted would suffer in like manner as these poor animals were made to suffer—a superstition which rose possibly from a hazy remembrance of the medieval practice which sought to slay people by putting pins into wax effigies. Be this as it may, the prisoners obtained no rescue at those hands of his which were so soothing to the old woman, and which he was wont to declare with pride had never yet shed human blood.

Years passed on; Scratchpole was never caught. Several narrow escapes he had. Horses were shot under him. Twice he was himself wounded, but had never fired in return. He was wont to say that he could trade upon his name alone—that a tinder-box was quite as useful as a pistol, for that so soon as people detected his apparently hairless head behind the crape mask they produced their money without a word. Ames too was cautious in the matter of firing, for it was one of the odd rules of

this contradictory period that highwaymen were not to be pursued with vigour unless they were guilty of bloodshed. People scampered after them a mile or two, then gave up the chase, and advertised next day for their watches, promising a reward and *no question asked*. It was the old story of the wasp and the towel. If the Collector was luckless enough to be caught, he was delivered to Jack Ketch at once without pity for being fool enough not to have escaped; and so the more harmless timid rogues who stole a herring were hung up by fifties, then handed to the surgeons, while the real scourge robbed with impunity so long as he merely threatened without going to extremities.

Jasper lived in town, occupied handsome lodgings, visited his sister at court, and was deemed eccentric for wearing his long locks unpowdered, tied with a simple ribbon. Sim Ames lived in Covent Garden, ruffled it with the best in gorgeous garments at playhouse or gaming-table, whither Jasper frequently accompanied him. Jasper joined in the popular vice as a blind, pretending to win vast sums which should account for his easy circumstances. He went further, for he privately supplied his sister with money, who quite believed that the gold she lost so recklessly was merely going back to the pit from whence it came. Her brother did not know, and she was too hardened to care, what society said, and society from time immemorial hath ever placed

the worst construction upon actions beyond its ken. Sim Ames also pretended to be lucky at cards, preparing for a rainy day, however, by borrowing small sums from his patron Lord Bute when fortune had been less kind than usual.

At Ames's warning Jasper rode away instead of entering the gates of Ranelagh; for though none suspected his trade there were sundry articles in his large flap-pockets which 'twere best Sir John Fielding, if the idea took him to institute a search, should never see. A sheet of crape, a pair of horse-pistols, a horn, an ingenious map of the by-roads about town traced in his own hand. He galloped after his comrade, and coming upon Hannah speeding wildly along caught her like an infant on his saddle-bow and made for Rosemary Mead. Hannah was more excited than usual. The muscles of her worn face worked like whipcords; her fists knotted in the air; she muttered incoherently:

“Lord Gowering's daughter, Lord Gowering's daughter! Rich and great is Lord Gowering's daughter! But she shall kneel for mercy before old Hannah yet!”

Jasper, through the rhythmical clatter of his horse's hoofs, caught the name, and asked in surprise:

“Hast seen her, Hannah? I thought ghouls and goblins were more in your line, mysterious hag, than a beautiful young lady of quality! And she is

wondrous fair, is she not ?” he went on dreamily. “She looked like the angel at the gate of Eden as she faced that mob in superb anger !”

Hannah glanced up quickly and clung close to him.

“You are not in love with her ?” she asked in imploring accents.

“In love with her—why not ? Is she not handsome enough ?” returned Jasper, laughing.

“No, no ! You must not love her ! You must not ! She is under the ban—the fatal ban ! I’ll add another inmate to the prison and dub it Lord Gowering’s daughter, that she may perish slowly, slowly, with the rest !”

Jasper reflected with lowering brow, and his face wore its darkest frown as he deposited the frail old hag at the door of Sot’s Hole.

“Mark me, Hannah !” he said with one finger raised as if lecturing a child ; “should the mad freak seize you to touch one single hair upon that lady’s head I will torture you with my own hands, and you shall die in supremest agony. Be wise then, and let there be method in your madness.”

She looked at him, scared, and fled, to be found presently drawing on the prison-door with a crooked finger dipped in water “GOW . . . ,” while her face twitched in spasms.

“He loves her ! He loves her, woe is me !” she mumbled to herself. “Must he too be withered by

the curse—the one man who can tune my heart-strings? Slowest torture! Oho! Who shall make me to endure more than I have already borne? But I may not die till Bambridge hath been punished—I may not!” and placing her ear to the woodwork of the mimic Fleet she lay at full length upon the grass while her body shivered as though racked by ague.

Jasper was too much annoyed this time to try and soothe her trouble. He thought perplexedly that it would be singular if this madwoman’s caprice should impel her to do injury unto his sister. Why of all women should she single this one out? No doubt her marvellous beauty casually seen had attracted the roving attention of the lunatic. This must be seen to. Perhaps it would be well to tell her that the Lady Grizel was his sister. Indeed it was high time that Bedlam should swallow the poor thing, lest haply she really might degenerate into a raving maniac. Then his heart was softened towards her, for he remembered that the same tyranny which had crushed her had worked his own undoing, and grinding his teeth at thought of Bambridge he raised his hat as a salute to the two highwaymen who swung in chains above his head.

“Hullo, Hannah, rouse thee!” cried jocund Sim Ames. “A pipe and spoon quick to mould bullets withal. Night is drawing in and we have a collection to make from my lord Bishop’s guests. ’Tis but

the taking of a toll, for will they not be travelling over our own land—ours by right of annexation? Hurry, my Jasper, hurry! You can meditate to-morrow.”

“The Bishop hath asked for a special parole,” returned Jasper moodily, “and hath sent forth his nimble boors to stuff the ruts with fagots. Fool! Do we not know each tree and bush in the whole track?”

“What a dance we’ll lead his merry men!” laughed Sim, and sang:

“ ‘He was met by a gentleman thief
Who kindly did him salute,
And bade him deliver in brief
Without any farther dispute;
But Joseph went up to him straight
And gave him a crack on the crown——’

What’s the matter, lad? You seem downhearted. Is it a yearning for the charms of masquerade or a longing for Faro and the wenches of Mary Bone gardens? Cheer up; we’ll fill our pockets to-night and empty them at the table to-morrow. What is the matter?”

“I wish I were dead,” returned Jasper sulkily. “Oh that my father’s son should have come to do such ruffian’s work!”

“Now I am surprised at you,” remarked Ames with a twinkle. “I should have adored the idea of being a natural son myself. No duties, no ties, no

responsibilities, no conscience ! To be sure I have none through culture, but you have none by right ; for the man who is cast nameless to shift or starve on the globe's surface can be held accountable to no social laws. What did that prime player at Drury Lane say t'other night when I nudged you, and you looked guns and culverins ? 'Thou, Nature, art my goddess. To thy law my services are bound. Wherefore should I stand in the plague of custom ?' Hum—hum—an excellent sentiment, but I forget the rest. But you looked so savage that the words should stick."

"Why bastard ? Wherefore base ?" Jasper proceeded with grim features and stern eyes. "When my dimensions are as well compact, my mind as generous, and my shape as true as honest madam's issue ! Oh Sim, Sim ! I cannot be indeed a bastard or surely my conscience would not thus assert itself ? When I receive a man's trinkets I love to take them because he is better off than I ; but when I go to the broker's on the morrow to change his goods for cash, I could beat my head against the wall for very shame. I should like to fling my pistols in the ditch or blow out my own brains with them. What is their gold to me ? Gaming makes me sick, for it turns men and women into devils who have no such cause for bitterness as I. But for Grizel I believe I should have rid the world of Scratchpole long ago," he sighed wearily. "But she wants money,

poor lily, and I like to think the nameless one can supply her wants."

"Ah, well," responded Sim, who knew by practice how to spur his mate's flagging resolution, "there is sure to be high play at the Bishop's fête, and your charming pensioner, whose persistency is worthy of better results, will to-morrow be out at elbows. Let us ease the pockets of the sparks to-night who will be sure to fill them again at her expense. To horse, man! or I'll tell the crimps of your whereabouts. By-the-bye, Nimming Ned was kidnapped yesterday by the smooth-faced agents of the East India Company, and was straightway carried to a horrid den where fifty country yokels were already confined pending transportation over the sea. But the crowd discovered the atrocity and released them all, giving the agents a good ducking. So you see that for robbing human flesh the trough is thought sufficient, while for the picking of a pocket the penalty is hanging."

"You are right," assented Jasper, blowing his priming. "It is a base one-sided world. Let us be gone."

They were speedily equipped, and started in the twilight by the bridle-path which was like the entrance to a maze. On reaching the spot where it debouches into the main thoroughfare, they took each one his station on either side of the road and waited. The moon was at the full, so that a vehicle

advancing along the straight rugged avenue could be seen a considerable distance away, likewise the approach of the patrol. A better spot for their purpose it would have been hard to find, for in case of danger or overwhelming force they had but to urge their horses through the thicket to place a dense barrier 'twixt them and their pursuers. Jasper, who had been skilfully worked up into a spiteful mood (no collector could be more uncompromising than he when roused), tucked his hair tightly under his hat which he fixed firmly on his brows, and pinned a crape-sheet to its two corners so that it hung to his breast. Taking a cat-skin from his pocket he fastened that over the white star between his horse's ears—he always made a point of riding a baldfaced horse in London—and his disguise was complete. So by this time was his companion's, who untied and shook out his wig, drawing a thick curl of it into each corner of his mouth to conceal his features in case of his mask being plucked off.

They waited long, Sim Ames complaining from time to time that it was dastardly of the guests to go to the fête by water. What would become of the poor collectors if people should take to being circumspect? Their occupation would be gone. They would have to turn honest. What a dismal, unremunerative, and harrowing prospect! At all events there was no sign of the patrol, which

showed at least that the Bishop was delightfully careless.

Sim was just launching out into a long story in an undertone about his papa, the old brandy-parson, who was grievously ill at Bath—perhaps dying—and the marvellous order in which he was kept by Madam Deborah (his cunning boy would never give any woman a right to worry *him*)—when the other whispered “*Hush !*” and a faint clink of iron against the stones became audible in the distance. Both craned eagerly down the road, and discerned a single horseman approaching rapidly.

“He’s a bold man or a poor one,” muttered Sim. “Perhaps only a pitiful servant with no coin. How I detest the disappointing lubbers !”

On closer inspection the rider proved to be handsomely if plainly dressed. As he was passing, whistling low in reverie, his horse shied, and he well-nigh lost his seat.

“Stand and deliver !” cried Jasper, looming like a shadow in front of him, while Ames cut off his retreat behind. The stranger looked from one to the other and smiled, as he endeavoured stealthily to push something into his fob.

“This is not fair ! Yet it serves me right,” he said, “for venturing alone. Two to one ! where is the armed escort which his Grace promised us ? He ought to make good all that’s taken on this road to-night.”

"Deliver without parley, sir," returned Jasper gruffly.

"With all my heart. Five guineas. I assure you I have no more."

"Your watch."

"I wear none."

"A lie!" retorted Sim. "I marked your elbow moving, and experience says that you were striving to hide your seals. We are not babes!"

"You do not deal with novices, sir," added Jasper. "Deliver! and no tricks."

Bowing, the stranger drew forth his watch and handed it to him.

"Now your ring."

"Never!" he cried, changing his tone from one of half-amused courtesy. "It is of no value, and I choose to keep it."

"Your ring!" repeated Sim, cocking a pistol.

"Never," repeated the stranger doggedly. "I resigned my watch and purse without a murmur, though God knows I am poor enough. I deserve to lose both for being such a fool. But this ring I choose to keep. It was my mother's last gift before her death, woven from her hair, and it shall remain with me till mine. So you may murder me if you please; I will not part with it."

"A bold knave!" muttered Sim approvingly. "Yet on principle I regret to say that I must shoot

you through the head. Once more, give it up or I swear to send you to kingdom come !”

The stranger, dropping his bridle, crossed his arms and looked without flinching down the barrel, which was pointed at his forehead.

“Upon my soul I swear I’ll fire !” cried Sim, striving to twist his good-humoured features into fierceness.

“Peace !” said Jasper impatiently. “He shall keep his ring and go about his business.”

“You are not master. I’ll have his ring to punish his obstinacy !” shouted his comrade.

“What is its value ?” inquired Jasper.

“Two guineas,” returned the stranger. “Settle it among yourselves, but make haste. I shall take cold if you keep me shivering on the borders of Styx.”

“Here are your two guineas,” Jasper said, tossing them to Sim. “For my own mother’s sake, who suffered overmuch and gave me naught, alas ! upon her death-bed—not even her blessing—you shall keep the token.”

“Thank you, sir,” said the stranger, holding out his hand, as Sim, mightily disgusted at the unbusinesslike transaction, replaced his pistol in its pocket. “I would have died sooner than resign it, so I thank you for my life. Shake hands.”

“With the man who hath robbed you of your purse ?”

“With him who permits me to retain that which

I look on as a talisman. I may be eccentric, but am not ungrateful. If ever I can be of service to you, remember Joe Meadows—the Pear Tree Coffee-house will find me. I am poor enough to-day; mayhap I shall be rich to-morrow. If years elapse” (he laughed) “before you think of finding me, who knows but what I may possess the wealth of the Tewkesburys and be worth the seeking? Yes; I am the Duke’s nephew and natural heir, though the old man, through some fancy or other, will not speak to me.”

“Pass on your way, sir, and good-night,” returned Jasper, whose quick ear had detected a faint rumbling of wheels.

“Stay!” interrupted Sim. “It would be well to remove the fagots from this trench. The gentleman shall aid us. ’Tis bad policy to let a man off too easily.”

“Folly,” retorted his comrade. “Begone, sir, and quickly. Good-night.”

With a courtly bow he pointed in the direction of the river, and Mr. Meadows, returning his salute, galloped away.

“You are a queer fellow! One never knows where to have you,” grumbled Sim. “Iron one minute, wax the next. ’Tis a shocking principle not to take all they have. Presently they’ll expect to keep the gold, handing us only the small change. I believe that but for that warp of yours you might

have been quite the mawkish upright gentleman—as cold and proper as the great icicle, Pitt, himself. Say, in your heart, would you not like to change your velvet coat for homespun?”

“Maybe! Who knows?” sighed Jasper. “Never mind might-have-beens. Hell’s walls are built of might-have-beens. Hist! Wheels and dust—a family coach with running footmen. A prize!”

The two collectors reconnoitred warily. A great lumbering vehicle like a house, creaking and swaying on its straps, drawn by four horses, guided by one postilion. Six footmen clustered behind, while two more ran in front, clad in purple silk petticoats, bearing in their hands long staves tipped by huge metal balls.

“Purple liveries and gold!” whispered Sim. “The very Duke of whom he spoke. We’ll not spare him at any rate, for the old curmudgeon is horribly rich.”

The carriage rumbled up, the highwaymen showed themselves from out the thicket. Sim called loudly on the coach to stop, bidding the footmen lie down on their faces in the ditch forthwith, while Jasper covered them with his pistols, and artfully placed himself so that the postilion’s body should serve as shield from any stray shots from within the carriage.”

The old Duke woke from a dream of Lady Grizel, and rubbing the window, caught sight of a blue

sleeve and a pistol. Now his Grace, when away from his charmer, was apt to be irascible. He railed bitterly then at the dastardly cowardice of his servants, who had obeyed orders with alacrity and were lying like a meek row of herrings on a counter, and in ire dashed a hand blunderbuss through the glass. But in breaking the pane he cut his fingers, and drawing them back in haste brought the shivered window in contact with the flint which fell on the steel and discharged the weapon. Fully awake now, he quite foamed with wrath.

“What!” he yelled, “you dare to fire on me—pigs, dogs, curs!—before I have made up my mind whether to deliver or not? We’re coming to a pretty pass. I’ll have ye hanged, every man of ye. Get up from off your bellies, swine! Will ye lie there and see your master murdered as well as robbed?”

“Begging your Grace’s pardon,” said Sim with mock humility, “none have fired but yourself, who have thereby displayed a lack of breeding for which you must pay double. Cast that weapon on the ground. Rob, forsooth! Who in this sinful world doth not rob? The tailor filcheth stuff in making your noble breeches. The vintner waters his wine, the butcher blows his meat. You yourself squeeze the widow and the fatherless for rent they cannot pay. We would but share for once with you, who feast in luxury at the Asparagus Gardens, while we

must e'en go slipshod to the herb-woman's to buy a farthing onion for a dinner. Now, as a noble and a senator, do you call that just?"

"Rogue! impudent rogue!" foamed the duke.

"Yea—a rogue! But bigger ones than I lie under marble, or live in ermine. Save your breath, for by your years you cannot have much to spare. I pray you, without more ado, to disfobulate that watch, to doff that ring, and—pay out your moneys. Aye! and take your shoes off too, for I happen to know that you told your valet once you kept notes in ambush there to cheat our craft. I fear your Grace will catch a cold bereft of your paper stockings; yet no! the air is mild and sweet, and summer approacheth on fleet wings. Take my advice though and discharge your valet, for he hath an indiscreet tongue."

The Duke, anathematising his domestics, produced a heap of silver and tendered it.

"I am on a pleasure-party," he urged, "and carry no gold."

"Here's a mean fellow!" cried indignant Sim, "we scorn to take silver from a duke. I have half a mind to give your august shoulders a caning for the desire to load my horse at such a rate. What the plague! must I be your porter? That gem is of purest water; I will have it. My comrade here will ease you of your watch. Diamonds again! a vastly pretty toy."

“Curs!” howled his Grace, “I will not take off my shoes. Keep the watch an’ it must be so. I will pay a reward, for it is my family watch. But let me keep the ring. It is meant for the finger of a lady whom I shall meet presently. You would not filch such a trifle from a woman?”

“The Tewkesbury family seem fond of rings!” laughed Jasper. “Your nephew went by but now, and was permitted to retain his ring as he gave good reasons for it. With your Grace it is otherwise. Keep his ring, comrade; I shall not pay you for that one.”

“That will I, and promise to boot that to-morrow a lady shall wear it—though not one of his Grace’s choosing. But we detain the Duke from his ridotto. He will be obliging enough, at peril of his life, to count five hundred ere he proceeds: and if he passeth his word to that effect we will trouble him no further. As I thought, the luxurious old man walks upon bank-notes! His varlets must even fetch his shoon for him!”

The Duke gave his word, and the two highwaymen, wishing him a pleasant party, dashed into the thicket.

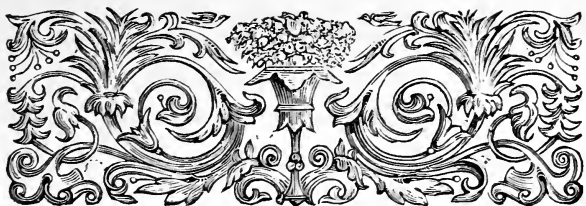
His Grace was in a piteous plight, for Sim had left the coach-door open, and had in mischief tossed the ducal shoes far among the trees. Count five hundred indeed! It would take longer time than that for the servants to light their lanthorns and search among the underwood for those indispensable

articles of dress. Had they taken his teeth for instance (a handsome set of teeth on a fine gold plate) he might have made shift to pass the evening in a dark garden, mumbling his love-passages only one degree less clearly than usual. But his shoes! It was as much as his precious life was worth to wander on dewy grass in stockinged feet, although perhaps the hard heart of Lady Grizel might have been won by the voluntary martyrdom.

His myrmidons searched like a band of glow-worms for the shoes, whilst their lord raved and impotently foamed.

“Mongrels, saucy wretches, pigs!” he cried. “Idiots! ye are in league with those rascals. That Scratchpole shall swing as high as Haman. I’ll pay the thief-catchers. He shall be caught. The country shall be scoured. I never promised they should not be followed. Let the runners mount the two leaders and ride after them. Track them to their haunt. Quick! are ye not expensively fed on white wine and beaten eggs? I know ye are all in league. Good luck! How are we fallen, when all the scurvy scum combine to beard us!”

So the hapless gentleman babbled and swore and stormed while the servants sought among the bushes for his shoes, and two running footmen—mounted for the nonce on carriage horses—started through the covert on a wild-goose chase.



CHAPTER XI.

A SYLLABUB PARTY AT THE BISHOP'S.



LTHOUGH my lord the Bishop has not succeeded in obtaining Lambeth, for which his soul longs, as did Ahab's for the vineyard of Naboth, yet hath he feathered his nest very prettily. That villa of red brick with white-framed casements at the river's bend between Fulham Palace and Hammersmith, which fills your heart with envy (as you glide in your wherry up the silent highway) on account of its noble trees, innumerable fantastic vanes and weathercocks, and quaintly laid out gardens, appertains unto his buccaneer Grace, who hath spent much money and such taste as he possesses in making of it an earthly paradise. As the snug cits row by on Sundays to while away their holiday hours with bowls at the Cat and Duck, they look with longing eyes at the neat house, its trim walks,

statues, Chinese bridges, and pagodas, and at the burly ecclesiastical figure with cauliflower wig, mulberry-nose, long clay pipe, and tankard, that basks on the sunny lawn surrounded by cringing satellites. A stately chapel, overtopping the high-pitched roof of the dwelling-house, proclaims to all who pass that the cosy abode belongs to a prince of the Church, while the nymphs and Venuses who coyly disport themselves in plaster—painted dreadfully like life—among the bushes, and the tables stained with dried rings from once o’er-bubbling glasses, seem to whisper to us that my lord looks kindly on the pleasures of Vanity Fair. Yes ; the Bishop prefers his comfortable arbour to his draughty chapel, whose threshold, I must admit, he seldom crosses.

But now it is not time for arbour or for chapel, for the circling glass and roystering song, or for snuffling matins. The owner of the villa is in a mighty fluster as he rushes hither and thither issuing orders to his servants in his big nautical voice, mopping his moist red face the while, for he is in the throes of a nocturnal fête at which young Prince George is to make his *début* in the world, and their Royal Highnesses may arrive at any moment. Lamps hang in festoons from bough to bough ; warm lights gleam from each hospitable window ; the gardens are already crowded with guests. Venuses of palpitating flesh and blood sweep the alleys in hoop and train, lightly clad enough in other

respects, for do we not know that noble dames who shudder at a draught in their own rooms are compelled by fashion to expose a vast extent of back and bosom in the street? And do we not also know that the quality of a lady is gauged by her length of tail—that the mayoress proclaims her rank by a termination as long as the caudal appendage of the bell-wether of Bantam, which (as all the world is aware) is trundled after her in a wheel-barrow? Nymphs sweep along with stately pace, dressed as shepherdesses with tiny straw hats on top of their powdered hair, bearing a crook in one hand and a stuffed toy lambkin under the other arm. They parade each one with her mincing beau, who discreetly withdraws into a bush at a bend in the walk, that for her train's sake she may sweep majestically round like a wheeling crocodile. Cows are tethered picturesquely on the lawn illumined by special lamps, that the wreaths about their necks may be plainly seen. Musicians with tabor and viola are ambushed here and there, but the Bishop, who knows his society well, hath enjoined them to make their presence known by continuous noise, lest they hear things which are best consigned to the discretion of night. They are wonderful to look on, are these rustic Damons and Phillises, with their thickly-daubed faces and rustic garb. Paint begets wrinkles, and many a comely girl is a hag at twenty-three. But as they never look young, so they never deem

themselves old, and a lady's age, always a dangerous subject for comment, becomes a hopeless enigma in these days of false hair and false complexions. The men with their broidered muffs, their affected gait, out-turned toes, and bent-in knees, are as remarkable even as the belles, for in this particular year they have just adopted the mode of "coifing" their own long locks, which take as wearyful a time to settle to their fancy as those of the Phillises and Chloes. Effeminacy so possesses them—they so dread a puff of wind or a drop of rain—that they dare rarely go abroad on foot. They are constantly retiring into corners, anxiously to survey their cheeks in a pocket-mirror, or to adjust a new patch, or add a touch of rouge, or rub their finger-nails with lemon-juice.

Mr. Pitt frowns sadly from the eminence of his reserve on golden youth when he passes it on the Mall, remarking to his companion and brother-in-law George Grenville, that our armies must perforce be officered by such fops as these, who look in their smart uniforms like campaigning trulls in disguise. He shakes his head when Grenville tries to comfort him, adding sharply :

"Cæsar at Pharsalia commanded to fire at the foe's face, and so produced instant rout. In these days the French should order to aim at the curls, and the result would be a *saue qui peut*. Alas ! into what a quicksand is England sinking !"

The open space in front of the Episcopal Gate was thronged during many hours with people who had trudged along Thames-bank in hopes of catching a glimpse of the young Prince of Wales. It was not known whether he would come by land or water, so they hung about the approaches, airing their opinions by groans or plaudits, as one by one the company arrived. The appearance of the Duke of Newcastle produced a storm of execration, which caused that time-serving minister to shrink and blench. For the Duke—timidity itself—was never weary of courting the popularity which evaded his grasp, by striving to bribe the mob with coins tossed out of windows just as he endeavoured daily to buttress his tottering cabinet by a liberal distribution of places and pensions. The muscles of his pale face twitched nervously at his reception, and he looked more than ever to-night (as Walpole whispered to George Selwyn) like somebody hanging in chains that wanted to be hung somewhere else. The mob at the gate were disappointed, for many unpopular persons escaped their malice by having taken boat; but even these had something to endure, for a smaller lot of idlers had braved prohibitory notices, and, daring to scale the palings which skirted the river stairs, were comfortably ensconced with dangling legs on the boughs of overhanging trees.

The Prime Minister could not but feel with terror that in spite of largesse and cajolery, the lower classes

were becoming dangerously uneasy. Vainly he sprinkled small silver as he stepped into his coach ; vainly his adherents bawled, " God save his Grace ! " Rumour growled like distant thunder of something seriously wrong, of bad news kept back and smothered. An evil spirit in the air whispered that Admiral Byng's ten ghost-ships had gone to pieces, that a catastrophe had occurred in the Mediterranean with regard to Gibraltar or Minorca, beside which Braddock's mishap at Fort Duquesne would be as nothing. Even the probability of invasion was not so hard to bear with equanimity as this, for the far-distant and unknown is always more alarming than that which may be measured by the eye. The preaching of Wesley and of Whitefield was beginning, as we have seen, to wake a slumbering germ of self-respect among the lower orders, which took the form of indignation at past misrule and an unreasoning hatred of those who so long had trampled on them. They scowled at the nobles on their way to Ranelagh, and discoursed in low voices anent the messengers who were fluttering in and out of New-castle House. What could such agitation portend ? The nobles, on the other hand, were too busy with the folly of the hour to remark the absence from the masquerade of the Prime Minister, of Mr. Fox, the Secretary of State, and the rest who were together dragging the nation to ruin. The evil spirit, passing over the aristocracy, urged on the mob to investigate

the matter, and so a herd of such as were too poor to be afraid of highwaymen, made for the Bishop's villa, despite its distance, and waited to see what the night would bring forth.

The mob received the obnoxious minister with hoots and groans and menacing of fists; and the unhappy Duke of Newcastle, having passed under the Caudine forks of popular displeasure, walked among the wreathed cows and raddled shepherdesses with Mr. Fox, to whom he vented his distress. But Mr. Fox gave him small comfort, for that selfish and calculating person foresaw the imminent break-up of the state vessel, and prepared to enact the character of rat. His lowering eyes persistently sought the ground as he observed musingly :

“Well, it's a bad job, I admit. Despatches may be doctored and paragraphs pruned for a time, but depend on it the truth will leak out at last. We are over head and ears in debt, altogether undone both at home and abroad. It is time for England to slip her cables and drift into an unknown sea. Quite a dreadful prospect !”

“What's to become of us ?” groaned the Duke. “I vow it's as much as my life is worth to publish this despatch of Byng's. They've a suspicion of it, I know they have. The rascals looked as though they could have eaten me. Minorca is lost. Our vessels never fired a gun.”

“They were not fit to fire a gun, I am told,” re-

marked Fox slyly, "and their keels so foul with shell-fish that they could make no way."

"Lies, lies! Will you turn on me too? You, whom I have enriched, but whom naught can satisfy! You who have spent mints on Holland House, which—well, well! God forgive me! I did it for the best. I've half a mind to give it up and go into the country."

"Like the pilot who guides a bark upon a reef, then jumps overboard? You did that once before, but returned to town next day because you got your feet wet. You know what I think about it, but you will never take advice. You must make a scapegoat of Byng. Shoot him as a sacrifice to popular wrath and then change your tactics. Money, man; money! That is the clue to every labyrinth. Instead of fitting out crazy hulks, which cost thousands before they reach their proper bed—the bottom—why not hoard up the money and buy off the French? Less trouble, less anxiety—more expensive no doubt—but it is neither you nor I who pay. Increase the taxes, then appease the scum by showing the fair face of peace and talking claptrap about the advantages of commerce. I know you think with me, but have not the courage of your opinions."

Mr. Fox, while he talked, was complacently watching a distant young couple who were pacing in deep converse under shadow of a hedge.

The Duke's goggle eyes filled with tears as he replied in a broken voice: "I came to you for comfort, Fox, and you insult me. I did my best; indeed I did. Is it my fault if fate pursues our arms by sea and land? But this last blow is awful. Whatever is to be done?"

Fox was too much engrossed with the behaviour of the young couple to answer. Presently arose a sudden clamour at the gate. The Duke trembled. Was the mob bursting in? No. It was a clamour of approval and delight. A coach with sky-blue liveries dashed up the drive.

"Mr. Pitt, the people's idol! He's always in the way," muttered the Duke querulously. "He does nothing but glare and find fault. Picking holes in another's coat is an easy matter. If he would only take office we should see how long his popularity would last. The man is quite insufferable."

"But useful," mused Fox. "The Minorca business is a bad job. Byng will have to be made an example of to divert trouble from yourself. It would be well to induce Pitt to break the news to the people. They will bear more from him than any one, and it will be prudent to mix him up with the failure somehow."

"What!" cried the Duke, in alarm. "I would rather tell them myself and be torn to bits at once than endure the outburst of that man's fury. His

eye terrifies me. The lash of his scorn curls like snakes about my limbs. I cannot bear it."

Indeed the poor Duke looked like a hunted animal as he groped for support or comfort and found neither. Mr. Pitt, with a cold bow, stalked past to the river stairs, where stood the Princess Dowager and her suite, who had just disembarked from the royal barge.

Fox was still gazing at that young couple who prattled and paced under the yew-hedge, and as he gazed new dreams of ambition took form within his brain. Mr. Stone, who joined him presently, followed the direction of his eyes and smiled with all his tusks. "A pretty couple, Mr. Fox," he said.

"Young Prince George is making much of my sister-in-law Sarah," acquiesced the other. "Yes, Stone. A vastly pretty pair."

The Princess Dowager was in a fluster. Her favourite's last sally had shocked her, not on account of the inherent impropriety of too lavishly displaying a fine figure ("What is the use of a fine figure if not to be looked at?" had cogently argued the maid of honour), but because of the bad effect which so liberal a feeling might have on an un-discerning scum. Well meaning and by no means stupid—too weak, perhaps, with regard to the symmetry of Lord Bute's calves—the Princess was fully aware of the critical position of the aristocracy.

She, like Mr. Pitt, deplored the effeminacy of the beaux, and more than half sympathised with popular disgust in the matter of rouge and pearl-powder as applied to a male cheek. For years she had jealously watched the growing of her son's intelligence, and had bottled and corked him, as it were, lest he too should be led to daub his fresh young skin with carmine. She loved her eldest-born after her fashion, and would have wept tears of humiliation had he elected so to disgrace his manhood.

She saw with a shrewd woman's eye the baneful effects of the strutting little sultan's debaucheries upon his subjects, and swore that if she could help it her young George should be no such disgusting swinish monarch. So she locked him up as long as might be, tied him to her apron-string, and sent him to bed betimes lest his ingenuous mind should be shocked by her own flirtations with Lord Bute. Then began the battle between herself and the tutor as the lad grew up as to which of them was to form the mind of their future King. Stone and his Grace of Newcastle strove to wrest him from her, but the desperate mother fought with teeth and nails, and my Lord Bute egged her on, for he mistily perceived future honours for himself if he could retain possession of this golden goose. Ambition grows as it feeds upon itself, and my lord, whilom the poor scare-

crow Earl, came by degrees to think that some day he might himself blossom into a statesman.

Stone signally failed in his efforts to secure the boy, but though beaten declined to admit that he was conquered. He oftentimes wins who plays a waiting game, and Stone, the inscrutable one, foresaw a moment when the young man, too carefully coddled at home, would of necessity be flung upon the world like a sapling, for the most wary woodman to train as he should list.

The moment of agony arrived at last when the Princess was compelled to cut her apron-string, when the fledgling must be allowed to flutter forth out of the nest—such an innocent, illiterate, grossly-unlettered fledgling too! By the law of England the Heir Apparent to the Throne is held to be of age so soon as he has passed his eighteenth summer. The Prince of Wales was now eighteen, and by no means could be bottled any longer. The mother dreaded the pleasant blandishments of the wicked world for her son, the lax morals of the youths of his generation, and, above all, the machinations of his insidious tutor Stone. There was no end to the crimes of which she deemed him capable. Was he not the sworn friend of that odious, dangerous, agreeable creature, Colonel Wilkes, whose ugly smile set matrons' hearts a-bobbing, whose sharp tongue enforced respect, whilst his orgies with the mock-friars of Medmenham Abbey caused

the periwigs of decorous people to stand upon end?

There were frightful reports current regarding these brethren of Medmenham, who were said to conduct their orgies in burlesque of Holy Church, to drink obscene toasts out of sacred chalices, to sleep their drunken sleep attired in sacerdotal vestments. There was even a well-authenticated story of the devil having been so pleased with them as to have joined their jolly drinking-bout in person, horns, hoofs, and tail complete, with pastilles of brimstone, and the pious declined to give credit to a later report that this same devil was no other than a frightened monkey that had escaped from a travelling show. If it were not the devil it should have been, for the crew were worthy of his patronage, especially Colonel Wilkes. The Medmenham friars were drunken, brilliant, dissolute fellows, no companions for a boy in his teens (devil or no devil); and the anxious mother, dreading danger, shook out her feathers and trimmed her spurs upon seeing Colonel Wilkes of the Bucks Militia smirking at her from the stairhead.

She had gone to Ranelagh as a duty, for was not the masquerade a protest of the higher against the insolence of the lower classes in daring to have an opinion upon their way of life? But she declined to allow her son to accompany her thither, and glad she was to have been so prudent, as it never would

have done for an inflammable lad to have gazed on the undraped perfection of Iphigenia adorned for sacrifice. Wild Lady Grizel was clothed now, if not in her right mind, and there was no danger from that quarter; but meanwhile his Royal Highness had been launched into society in her absence, and his timorous mamma was burning to know what he thought of his future female subjects. Poor young George! She need not have been so anxious. He was as narrow-minded, as ignorant, good-tempered, dull, unsophisticated, as youths generally are who have been brought up under a petticoat, and lulled to rest by bedchamber-women. He was incorrigibly indolent, and obstinate by reason of his ignorance; had been known to spell pudding with one d and cosmetic with a k; but for all that he painted not his comely face nor wore a wig, but tied back his own powdered curls from his smooth brow with a simple ribbon, and was pronounced *lumpish* but handsome, with the making of a very pretty fellow.

Upon mounting the steps by aid of Mr. Pitt the Princess exclaimed at once: "Where's George—where's the poy? Grizel, go zee as 'e gets in no drubble. Dat Wilkes here? A nice pishob to ask such devil's spawn!"

"It grieves me if my ugly face displease your Highness," replied Wilkes, bringing one squinting eye to bear on her. "You do well to place the

youth under the care of godly Lady Grizel, who will no doubt instruct his opening mind upon many interesting subjects."

Colonel Wilkes's smile was winning despite his blackened teeth, as he bowed low before her Royal Highness, but he hated her for the public insult, and was storing away a goodly cargo of such stuff in his heart of hearts to be poured back later mixed with corroding venom. Colonel Wilkes never forgave a slight, and he was an admirable hater because he was content to await his opportunity for years. Lifting the royal lady's unwilling hand to his lips he departed to join Stone and Fox, who were still watching a certain young couple cooing under a yew-hedge like turtle-doves.

Lady Grizel, who only waited for a chance of escape, took the hint of her mistress with alacrity, and was speedily lost in the crowd by all but the straining eyes of tearful Lady Gladys.

She wrapped her cloak about her, and eagerly scanned each man who wore a uniform. At length she espied the one she sought, clad no longer in the borrowed trappings of a running footman but in scarlet and buff with black facings. A black stock showed up the tanned colour of his face as he paced up and down in the fitful light of swinging oil-lamps.

"He's here as I expected," she murmured, slackening her pace. "I must not seem to seek him."

Raising his troubled eyes from the ground he recognised the slim commanding figure, and strode up to it.

The twain looked each other in the eyes, each trying to read the other's soul. After a while, she of the sapphires set in a thicket of brown lashes looked down the Honourable Jack. Of the two hers was the more masculine, his the weaker nature. She felt as much with joy, which was quickly tempered by the remembrance that this less noble creature had wrecked her life for ever.

"After so long an absence you need to look your fill," she observed demurely. "I protest you are quite a soldier; bronzed, weather-beaten, and if I mistake not unrouged. Odd! In this particular at least we are alike, though in others changed no doubt beyond recognition."

"Changed! Yes, you are changed, Grizel," retorted the soldier hotly; "and for the worse. I left you a bright bird to whom each flower was a joy, each cloud-fleck a rapture, each passing shower a marvel. Your beauty drove men mad, yet they blessed their madness, for a gleam from those deep blue eyes of yours was like a glimpse of heaven. The gleam shines fitfully still from out of them, but it is lurid—a flash from hell."

"Hell be it," retorted Lady Grizel with bitterness. "Satan was an archangel once. Who made me what I am? You. Yes, I admit the truth of your

reproach. I was a girl without experience who never harmed you ; with a heart like a clean white slate to be writ upon, and you wrote on it. But the words once writ may never be effaced. Oh, these men, these men ! These superior beings who treat us like toys, playthings of their caprice, inferior animals ! who forget that these frames of ours (whose weakness should claim respect), which they bruise so idly and break so easily, contain souls akin to theirs, which have besides an extra gift. You destroy, then cast us aside, like so much broken porcelain ; satisfied that with our death there is an end of us. Not so. In my suffering (and I did suffer) I knew that there must be an after life, or else the blows which crush us here would be a shame to God. It came on me as a revelation, and sustained me when I thought I must surely sink under the weight of my pain. You break us for a few years on this puny earth and forget even our existence. But one day you will climb up to God's throne claiming admittance to His paradise, and we your victims shall cry out against you. We will rise and cry, ' Soul for soul ! ' They wantonly practised on our weakness, these men, and for our weakness' sake we are forgiven. But you—no ! the strong who wreck the weak may never be forgiven. You showed no mercy. You shall receive none ! ”

The Honourable Jack was awed by the words of Lady Grizel, which seemed wrung from her in

sharp throbs like arterial blood. He had quite resolved to take her roundly to task and kindly promise to forgive her if she would undertake to reform. Instead of which she was riposting carte and tierce, and pricking him all over with her rapier-point.

He remained silent, at a loss what to say, and she proceeded :

“Finding me silly and confiding, you basely stooped to trap me in a vulgar snare ; then fled like a coward till time should reconcile me to your trick !”

“I swear,” blurted out rueful Jack, “that I would have returned to England long since if I could.”

“In a moment of pique I succumbed to the reasoning of an aunt who is dead and suffering punishment—let her pass—and married you. I did not care about you, but thought you prim and proper, a safe guide for a young girl who mistrusted her own judgment. What a deception then was mine ! I would have plotted for you, schemed for you, worked hard to place you on fortune’s ladder ; for I never really loved his Grace of Hamilton. Indeed I loved no one, and now never shall. But then I found out the fraud, and drop by drop the good within me waned. Like an ice-block in the sun I saw it diminish till nothing was left but water. And I did weep during long nights of outraged

pride. I watched till all the good was gone, then was I affrighted. What will become of me, I thought—young, beautiful, dowerless, disillusioned, heartless—in a depraved court and a corrupt age? Shall I sink, I wondered, to the level of the vilest courtesan? In wild glee I hoped I might, that my sins might be inscribed on your page of the judgment-book. I seemed to see sin piled on sin, iniquity on enormity, till they formed such a load as should drag you down. But then I relented. Happily for men, women are as unstable in their wrath as in their love. I said to myself, ‘They have ruined me, those two. They have made the garden of my heart a howling wilderness.’ Why should I make it my life’s business to commit infamies merely to pile on them? No. I will be happy in this world’s acceptance of the term. I have been betrayed, and love died stillborn. Yet is it a fair world, and full of goodly fruit. I will pluck and eat of it *selon ma guise*. I have plucked and eaten, and no thanks to you I am enjoying myself in the way which seemeth best unto my fancy.”

Lady Grizel resolutely crossed her arms, and marked with triumph how gruesome was the aspect of the Honourable Jack under her lecture. He bit his lips, and was the picture of indecision. Had he not come to Fulham bent upon chiding his wife’s unseemly conduct? And lo! she had smitten him hip and thigh, and altogether toppled him off the

marital pedestal. Every word she said was true. He felt it, and was disgusted with himself.

“Then what do you intend to do?” he asked doubtfully. “For after all I am your husband, am I not?”

Lady Grizel burst into a shout of laughter which woke staid owls from an uneasy sleep and sent them screaming in concert into the black vault.

“Excuse my rude mirth,” she said, trying to stifle her merriment. “I begin to think I wronged you. You evidently are no schemer. It must have been my wicked old aunt. You have spent nine years in Indian wigwams, and have learned the transparent arts of Silverskin, and the diplomacy of Wishtonwish. Do you not know how easily the chains of wedlock are welded and riven in these sinful but convenient days? I vow it is their redeeming point. You have been nine years absent, and because I am still a maid you think it is for love of your *beaux yeux*? Commend me to a man for sublime conceit!”

Here she plumped a magnificent curtsy which caused those who saw her from a distance to mutter, “That madcap is playing off her tricks again.”

“Know then, *monsieur le lieutenant*, that the only independent witness of that ill-judged affair is dead; that the naughty parson is beaten each evening like a carpet before being folded up for the night; and that the beater is my old maid, Deb, who is devoted

to me. That little mistake is rubbed clean off the slate, thank goodness, though the result remains so far as my contempt for you is concerned. We meet like strangers after nine years' interval. Believe me, it will be wiser to let bygones be bygones and remain such."

The maid of honour's sharpened hearing detected the rustling of silk in a neighbouring avenue.

"Why, here comes your old flame, Mr. Bellasis," she said in loud clear tones. "You gay young soldiers have no feeling for us. While I am flirting with you, who shall tell what dreadful things that marvel of stolidity young George may be committing? Never trust quiet men, you know. Come to my toilette at Leicester House; I shall be vastly pleased to chat over the past with an old friend. Good-bye, in case we meet no more to-night."

She held out her hand with the frank movement which was so winning in her, and nodding archly to a dark-robed lady in the shadow of the shrubbery, tripped off lightly to look for the young Prince.



CHAPTER XII.

MR. PITT TO THE RESCUE.



HE Honourable Jack stared after her utterly dumbfounded. No doubt secretly forged bonds were easily broken—at least, they had been, until the new act came into force, anno 1753. People tore up their marriage lines and threw them in the fire, but he had never reckoned upon the possibility of the practice taking effect in his own case. In his prim way he was hurt by the proceeding. If a secret marriage is to be quashed, it is only proper that both parties should agree thereunto. Instead of which, here had this wild woman taken matters into her own hands and acted in utter scorn of him. Stay! She had never asserted that all proofs of the marriage were destroyed. She had merely hinted that their existence or non-existence depended on her own will and pleasure. She was

rarely beautiful and as recklessly brave as beautiful. Perhaps she meant only that she was again to win ! Yet no. Her behaviour was shocking to a sensitive mind, her language bold, her manners brazen, her morals uncertain. This wife of his would be a terrible companion for a lifetime. As he pondered, he began half to hope that those proofs were indeed destroyed, for instinct told him that, were the chains to be re-riveted, she would rule him with iron rods which should eat daily into his quivering flesh. He felt that he could not cope with that imperious will, and wondered at the dreams of bygone days beside the distant watchfires. Oh ! what a mockery are our day-dreams ! On what insecure foundations we erect those airy palaces, which would, more often than not, crush us into powder were the whim gratified which bids us try to live in them ! Lady Grizel had first shocked then affrighted the Honourable Jack. Her departure was a relief, as might be the vanishing of a baleful ghost, who looks charming till she sits upon our chest like lead. He wondered how he ever came to marry her at all. Yet, ah ! she was different in those days, and so was he perchance ; and besides, they were both tools in another's hands. He looked up with a feeling half of remorse half of relief as he beheld the mild eyes of Lady Gladys fixed on him.

Meanwhile Prince George was in the seventh heaven, unconscious that people were murmuring,

“What a charming pair!” equally unconscious that half the raddled beauties were enduring agonies of acute envy. This was the first occasion upon which his Highness had appeared in public, save at drawing-rooms, where he never spoke, and tremendous was the excitement among the shepherdesses in consequence. On his arrival by barge at an early hour, he was met at the stair-head by a company of Buffs, who escorted him with military honours to the drawing-room. Here he partook of tea and a little fruit, and returned by bows the curtseys of the fair. Old dowagers watched narrowly his every movement while they took snuff, and after severe scrutiny decided that his behaviour was quite decent. The younger ladies ogled at him, and were amazed to discover that he took no notice of them. He was evidently very shy, and no wonder, for his life had hitherto been that of a recluse. He was known to be very pious, and very homely—and some whispered—very cold-blooded. It was no marvel then that he should be disconcerted by this liberal display of bosoms—this sudden coruscation of sparkling eyes. Vainly Lady Petersham displayed a dimple in her back, vainly Miss Ashe wriggled her shoulders; Prince George was busy munching cakes and looking out for the arrival of his mamma. The young ladies began to wonder which of them was to have the honour of bringing out the boy, of teaching him the rudiments of love. Miss Ashe swore roundly that

none was so fit as she—and probably she was right, for sure no lady of fashion in the capital had drunk so deeply of the cup of vice. Lady Petersham desponded, for she argued by her own character that Lady Grizel must have practised her artillery upon the boy for years, and if she had failed to break this crust, who could hope for success? What was the surprise of the company when the young man, sublimely oblivious of the heart-burnings going on about him, of the embryo meshes already forming round his feet, stopped abruptly between two bites of a macaroon, and leaving an aged countess in the midst of a reminiscence, strode through the throng up to a dark girl modestly dressed in white muslin, who flushed crimson at his approach.

“Lady Sarah, I am sure—hey?” he said in his thick utterance. “My dear old playmate grown quite a woman. And I am quite a man. We’ve not met for years, but I knew you at once.”

Lady Sarah Lennox timidly placed her little hand in his, and he raised it to his lips, forgetful now of the astonished circle of eyes.

“Let us take a walk,” he said, “I hate these indecent women with their paint and diamonds. A little clean water would be more becoming, what?” So he tucked Lady Sarah under his arm and sought out the most sequestered alley, and all the dames held up their hands, vowing that still

waters run deep ; that they must be careful of their precious reputations ; and that this half-fledged sister of Lady Gladys was an artful brazen minx.

Minx or not, she had fulfilled the promise of her babyhood, for she was very lovely, and appeared the more so from the simplicity of her attire. The beauty of her figure achieved additional interest among so much nudity by being closely draped. Like Lady Grizel, she wore no paint. Her coal-black hair was drawn up unpowdered over a cushion and adorned with a single red rose. Her silken lashes cast long shadows on her cheeks. Her mobile brows showed that her temper was no whit less quick than when as a child Lady Grizel had so often teased her into passion. A bright warm-hearted English girl, lovely with the loveliness of health and youth, and flashing eyes and pouting lips, quick to resent affront, quick to forgive—such was Lady Sarah at seventeen, when she, like her playmate, made her first appearance in society.

The two wandered up and down the yew walk hand in hand, forgetful of the time, the place, or the Princess's coming. The young man, whose thoughts had been pent up within him by the noxious atmosphere in which he lived, who could make no confidante of the mother whom he feared, or of her admirer, or of the whist-playing maids of honour, felt the dam of his reserve give way in the presence of his old friend. Does not youth yearn

for active sympathy? As we grow older the world instils into us the hard lesson of self-reliance—of striving to be sufficient unto ourselves. If annoyed or victims of unmerited ill-usage, do we not take up our favourite author and forget our sorrows as best we may in communing with that silent monitor? But at eighteen it was not so. We panted for the pressure of a soft hand in reply to our tirades, for the murmur of a tender voice; we longed to behold a pearly drop on the eyelash of another, and having seen it were comforted. Young George poured forth his artless sorrows into the little pink ear of Lady Sarah and was very much comforted, while she, as she listened, felt an overwhelming compassion for the youth. Young women are many years older than men of the same age, and, knowing this, delight in setting themselves up as teachers. Which is there among you, oh dear ladies, who doth not rejoice in lecturing a male friend? Who is not certain that she understands his business so much better than he can himself, and prates sapiently thereanent accordingly? It is a harmless foible, for if the man is in love with you, he is of course prepared to commit any folly—and if not, may be expected to be wiser than to take serious heed of your prating. In our young desire for sympathy we are never weary of craving advice, but how often do we act upon the counsel given?

Lady Sarah was very sorry for the young Prince,

who occupied a difficult and false position, and was humble enough to be aware of his own deficiencies. He could barely read or write, had been kept so long in leading-strings as to have lost the use of his mental limbs, was not gifted with a high intelligence, had no mentor on whom to lean safely until years should have brought with them experience. And yet this raw lad might be called upon at any moment's notice, now that he was on the eve of his majority, to wield the sceptre of one of the greatest kingdoms in the world at a moment when it seemed tottering to its fall. He hated his old grandfather, the little sultan, for that bashaw had once dared to strike the boy with his crutch when on a visit at Hampton Court, and the high-spirited lad never forgave the blow—indeed so deeply did he feel the humiliation that he never, during his life, could be got to visit Hampton Court again. He loved his mother and feared her, but had a dim sense of her unwisdom. He liked Lord Bute, and was much impressed by the solemnity of that awful peer. He did not care for Mr. Fox, for his boyish instinct told him that a man who looks ever on the ground is usually false of heart. He disliked Mr. Pitt, for like all ignorant people the Prince took prejudice for conviction, obstinacy for strength of purpose, and had been strongly imbued both by his mother and my Lord Bute with a desire to see the Royal Prerogative stretched to

the utmost. Now Mr. Pitt was deficient in respect for the Royal Prerogative, and held theories according to which the country's interests should be centred in the great lords of the land—Whig lords of course—and so, in Mr. Pitt, Prince George was not inclined to put his trust. Who then was left? Nobody; for it never occurred to him that Stone ever presumed to aspire to guide his actions. With dread he saw himself on the eve of a great struggle—alone at eighteen years old—and with the inconsistency of his age he turned from sedate men of standing, impulsively to place his confidence in a girl with flashing eyes and pouting lips. He wandered up and down the yew walk with Sarah, and she gravely lectured him on that of which she knew even less than he, and he listened entranced, and pressed her little hand, and she looked sweetly on him, and oh! how quickly the minutes flew!

On this unsatisfactory globe everything pleasant has an end. The yew walk had an end, and as the turtle-doves turned for the hundredth time they beheld Lady Grizel on the path like the angel come to turn Adam and Eve out of Paradise.

“Where is my poy!” said that skittish person, audaciously mimicking the mother to the son. “He is a baby who will get into mischief, so he must be whipped and sent to bed. Fie for shame, *monsieur mon Prince!* Already caught. *Quel progrès!* Vastly sweet to be sure. As I live

here's my old foe the scorpion, not grown so very hideous neither. The last time I saw you was with a backboard and a book on your head, practising the art of ladylike deportment with your governess."

Lady Sarah recoiled as though she had seen a serpent. This woman was an enemy. She knew it. She returned Lady Grizel's mock curtsey with a bend of the head; while her cavalier felt foolish and looked so. The maid of honour danced a few steps blithely on the gravel and sang a fragment of a love-ditty.

"My dear children," she said, "this will never do. You must accept the mode, and plaster your faces thick to hide your blushes. You are both as red as peonies. Mamma won't be pleased with her poy! My good girl, I would not spoil sport for the world, but I was sent for him." Taking the Prince's arm she was about to bear him off in triumph, when her better nature gleamed forth for a moment, and stopping she said quickly over her shoulder, "Sarah! don't let this boy break your silly heart. Put no faith in man, for men were deceivers ever! You hate me for speaking so. Dreadfully indelicate, no doubt! You never had a better friend though than I am now!" Then, as if ashamed of the momentary impulse, she dragged off his Royal Highness, forcing him to dance along the path with her, and down a side avenue where quite unaccountably they came

upon the other sister in a similar position with Mr. Bellasis.

“Oh, hide your eyes, my Prince!” she shrieked; “this is a shocking place. Everybody seems talking hearts and darts except poor me! I suppose I am quite old and frightful. My neck’s like leather; all in folds like the elephant in Marybone Gardens, and my foot is like his too, all round and gouty!” And she stretched out for public inspection the fairest neck imaginable, and exposed the most ravishing little bare foot in a golden sandal—last relic of Iphigenia.

Lady Gladys gazed earnestly at her fellow maid of honour, and marked, half in terror, that there was nothing of jealousy in her demeanour. The Honourable Jack was troubled, the Prince shy and shocked.

Lady Grizel was mistress of the situation. The result of her diplomacy surpassed her expectations.

“I vow I am a *trouble-fête*,” she cried. “Come to-mamma, sir. Behold them as amorous and billing as Philip and Mary on a shilling. But really, Gladys, you should look a little after your sister. She soars high. I found her in a deep flirtation with a *great personage*. Mum! We will be discreet.”

Again she was dancing off when Lady Gladys caught her dress.

“Stay!” she said nervously, “you will drive me mad. Are you a fiend? What means this fooling?”

Lady Grizel turned on her with her most superb air.

“What fooling?” she asked shortly.

The second maid of honour looked up in search of some sign which might betray the working of the springs within. But she could see only the white classic mask and the cold Medusa eyes that were unfathomable. In mental anguish and sore trouble she wrung her hands, muttering half audibly, “I must have been deceived. Such impudence could not be. And yet—and yet—I saw——”

“What, and when?” demanded imperious Medusa.

Lady Gladys looked at her once more imploringly, then at the Honourable Jack, who was observing the wonders of the firmament, and faltered, “What? nothing. I must have been mistaken, or this woman is not human!”

Once more his Royal Highness and his weird companion danced away. The lad, though retiring and reserved by nature, was used to the girl’s mad-cap tricks, and accustomed to give in to them. So they danced into the group composed of Fox, and Stone, and his Grace of Newcastle, all of whom were still meditating on the “charming pair.”

“Oh, Mr. Stone!” laughed Lady Grizel. “Such fun! We came just now on a couple making furious love.”

“There are, I fancy, a good many such about,” returned the tutor, showing his teeth.

“But none so outrageous as these. Who do you think? Prim Mr. Bellasis and mawkish Gladys. I do trust they will make a match of it—such a pair of frumps!”

It was to be war then.

Stone planted his first arrow in the afternoon; his adversary fired her first shot at night. War to the knife. Both sides had commenced well.

The Princess Dowager was holding her court with a bad grace in the Bishop's drawing-room, for if walls have ears so have bushes, and eyes too; and the spiteful beauties were full of the young Prince's flame for the insignificant chit Lady Sarah. She had also been duly informed of the three gentlemen who were looking on hopefully, each one trusting that this promising affair might be cultivated into bringing grist to his own especial mill; and misgivings arose in her mind, which was already so well broken to court intrigue. What if the Duke of Newcastle and Stone were to try to bridle the boy by means of this boyish freak, and induce the girl's relation Mr. Fox to aid and abet them? The Princess began to blame herself for having kept the lad so close. Of course he was bound to celebrate his freedom by some folly, and here it was at once.

How hard it is for mothers to know what is best. There are boys and boys—all contradictory, complicated, intricate of fibre, dreadfully inflammable. How much more convenient it would be if they

could be made all alike, cut from a pattern, to be treated by prescription according to set usage. But no. However carefully you fence them round they break out in some unexpectedly weak spot, and spread dismay in the bosom of their mamma, who cries out too late that she would she had acted otherwise. Yet who may settle by logic the freaks of which fledglings will be guilty? Do they not all begin life by falling desperately in love with somebody who does not care about them, swearing to blow out their brains for the sake of one who reckes not if they live or die, while those who gave them birth, and would give up their lives for them, sit alone by the deserted hearth?

“Yet,” thought the Princess, as she pretended to listen to a gouty old peer, “had he been allowed more freedom he might have become one of the hateful, frivolous carding fops. Anything was better than that. As things were he was a well-ordered youth, pious and reserved if stupid, and would no doubt be obedient to his mother and do as she bade him always. Perhaps after all she was terrifying herself with a shadow. The girl had been the playmate of his infancy, and it was only natural that he should be glad to see her again.”

Prince George's mother was not in the best of humours when Lady Grizel appeared with her prize, treating her son with undeserved asperity, forgetting that the one thing which cuts a young man to the

quick is a want of respect for his manhood. She spoke to him in her broken English as if he had been in pinafores, and with a surging feeling of something more than annoyance, he inwardly determined to go barefoot round the world if needful for his Sarah.

The position was becoming unpleasant, for it is not pleasing to watch family squabbles carried on in public, when a diversion came from an unexpected direction. Strangest of all sights—the old Duke of Tewkesbury was actually talking to young Meadows whom he hated because he was his heir. Now all the world knew, and his Grace took care they should, that the mere sight of Meadows—harmless, lymphatic young person—was distasteful to the Duke, who declared that in presence of his nephew he felt half dead and buried, and that the odious creature was continually appraising his remaining stock of health. The Duke, though over eighty, felt quite a stripling; therefore he naturally loathed an heir who reminded him of the family vault, and so declined to have aught to do with him. But now they were actually conversing, and Lady Grizel wondered if they had made it up. Far from it. His Grace was more incensed than ever. Both had been robbed by Scratchpole the noted highwayman, and one at least of his victims vowed to have his life. Was there ever such an indignity offered to a Duke as to compel him to grope for his shoes

in a thicket? But that was not all. He, Premier Duke of England, had been evilly entreated, robbed of watch, rings—everything; was it not like the impudence of Meadows to have got off better than himself? Therefore, the Duke's ire being roused, it was a fair opportunity for crushing this impertinent heir!

"Sir," said the Duke, controlling himself with difficulty, "I am much obleeged by your commiseration, which mayhap will not be mightily increased when I tell you that I have not caught cold, and that I intend to live fifty years to spite you. The ring I lost was an engagement ring intended for the finger of my Lady Grizel here, should she deign at length to consent to become my duchess. It was a paltry offering, so I am half glad that it is gone. With your permission I will buy a better one to-morrow."

"Your Grace is very fine," returned Mr. Meadows stiffly. "May you be preserved from colds with flannel, and may you long live under the shadow of your olive-boughs. You never gave me anything, and I desire nothing at your hands."

With a deep obeisance he turned upon his heel, while all looked at Lady Grizel, whose eyes sparkled. But she observed Stone leaning against a doorway and displaying his tusks; so she modestly lowered her lids and said nothing, while the Princess whispered, "Take him, madgab. Don't be a

voole; did I not always zay he was the man for you?"

And the company marvelled whether the strange damsel would throw this chance away or be settled in life at last.

There was a rushing noise without, a babble of voices, a patter of feet. The company looked at each other in surprise. The Bishop, who was handing dishes of Bohea, stared and changed colour. The noise increased, then stopped, and one silver-toned voice was heard ringing through the silence. Then the rushing noise was heard again, accompanied by fierce huzzas and a crash of palings. The Princess turned to bid my Lady Grizel "Go zee 'oo's dat," when Mr. Wilkes in wild excitement dashed into the room.

"The lion's roused at last!" he panted. "Upon my word I believe he's in earnest. What eloquence, what fervour, what withering invective! Come and hear him! His Grace of Newcastle trembles like an aspen-leaf. The mob have broken in to listen to their oracle. He holds them in his hand as presently he will hold the entire nation."

"The mob," stammered Lord Bute, "have dared—with her Royal Highness here and the young Prince! What insolence!"

"This is no time for etiquette, my lord," sneered Wilkes. "We're plastered overmuch with court-venceer already. Mr. Pitt has been feverishly

wandering like a caged beast ever since he came. He had ordered his coach and was about to retire, when George Grenville arrived on horseback, a bearer evidently of news. Mr. Pitt winced as if he had been struck when his brother-in-law read the tidings, and he instantly sought out the Duke of Newcastle, who mumbled something and wept abject tears. The rumours which have crept about are true. The absurd armament which was sent out under Byng hath been discomfited ; the French flag waves over St. Philip's ; Minorca has fallen disgracefully without shots being exchanged. The cup of national disgrace has brimmed over at last, and we are the laughing-stock of Europe. What more could the enemies of England desire ?”

“Mr. Pitt shall save the nation !” cried Lady Grizel impetuously.

“Perhaps,” returned Wilkes. “He hath risen from his apathy at last, and all the dolls have left their mummery to hearken to him. His words roll forth like molten gold. Come, I say, and hear him. With such a man among us we may yet cudgel fortune.”

Colonel Wilkes dashed out of the window, followed now with undignified haste by the Princess and her suite, and even by solemn Lord Bute, who distrusted Pitt, but who succumbed like the rest under the general contagion.

Pitt stood on the landing-stage with his lean arms

raised aloft. His slim figure, in its black velvet, was cut out like a sable shade against the gleaming oily water—tawny now with the first glimmer of dawn; against a pale sky, across which scudded—driven by rising wind—dense waves of sullen cloud. His ascetic face, which caught the full glare from a lamp-illuminated bough, seemed like that of one inspired, as his burning eyes strained to pierce those cloud-banks in search of a rising sun. His every word fell sharp and clear like a musket-shot in the deep silence, for a hush of awe had fallen on the crowd of guests who had clustered round him from all quarters. The crumbling barrier which marked the Bishop's boundary was broken down. Newcastle lay prone upon a bench sobbing convulsively. The expectant mob, already suspicious, had been lashed beyond control at sight of George Grenville's mud-bespattered dress and the foam-flecks of haste upon his horse. Something dreadful had taken place, and they would know it. With a howl they strove to enter the gates with him, but, repulsed by a guard within the railings, had skirted the enclosure and burst through the rotten barrier just as their champion began to speak.

“Our country lies bleeding; perchance expiring!” he began in low accents like the mournful wind. “Not by mischance or cowardice of her own, but by the misconduct of one baneful minister. One palsied man hath led us to a precipice. His under-

lings vie with each other in indolence and selfishness. They are affected by no other zeal than that of seizing the highest post, grasping the largest salaries. In this at least they are adepts. They cry, 'Give, give !' and lap with hungry lips the last draining drops of their country's life. Purveyors and contractors follow suit. Foul vermin all !" Then, flinging his arms above his head, the orator cried : " We will trust to this blind guide no more ! His swarm of parasites shall all be swept away ! Our ships are given over to the worms ; our gallant sailors sent to the bottom of the ocean, murdered in cold blood by incapacity. The lives of our seamen shall be demanded of this man ! What censure shall we pass on the Judas who betrays his country to defeat ? What rock shall be hurled to crush him into nothingness ? Though his ashes were scattered to the four winds of heaven the breezes would still whisper of his shame, and children not yet conceived would grow to manhood cursing his blighted memory. Vainly have we knocked at the door of these slumbering janitors, crying, 'Awake !' Nay, flattery will no longer avail. Truth alone can save us in this awful crisis. Why, the commander-in-chief is at the head of a scroll of paper only. If the French know how to make use of their advantages, on this day month we may not be a nation. We are committed to war, and must abide the issue. War shall be solemnly declared. A day of retribution is at

hand when the vengeance of an injured people shall fall heavily on the authors of their ruin. Any state is better than despair. If we are to fall, let it be with a front towards the foe. St. Philip's is lost. Admiral Byng——”

“Give us his blood!” yelled the wild beasts clustered round the palings. “We will have his blood!”

“Byng shall be spared,” cried Pitt, wheeling round with imperious gesture. “He is but a tool in unclean hands.”

“You would defend him!” murmured Fox. “Unwise! these ruffians must have a scapegoat, or else the Duke here——”

“Byng shall be spared!” repeated Pitt, frowning. “I will myself defend that traduced and friendless man.”

Lord Bute could restrain himself no longer.

“You dare to assume strange powers, sir!” he said. “You forget that her Royal Highness and the young Prince of Wales——”

“My lord,” returned Pitt coldly, “I revere the just prerogative of the Crown, but I also hold in reverence the people's rights. The army is the thunder of the Crown. This wretched minister here hath deliberately tied the hands which should direct the bolts. I remember that Minorca hath been lost for the want of four battalions. I remember that the First Lord of the Admiralty told us from his place without a blush that forty-two ships of the line were

ready to sail, whereas only eight were ready, and these were leaky hulks. The fleet of France is thirty-seven ships of the line, well-manned, and innumerable frigates. A first lord who does not keep a fleet superior to that of France, deserves to lose his head. We have had more than enough of spring hopes and vernal promises, which have been nipped by equinoctial disappointment. You think me rash, Lord Bute, and over-sanguine of myself. One maxim has guided my life, and shall guide it to the end—to be led by the dictates of common sense. The condition of human nature would be lamentable indeed, if nothing but the greatest learning and talent—vouchsafed to so few—were sufficient to direct our conduct. My lord, there is one man at least who can save England. I am that man. And by God's help England shall be saved, even though she be at her last gasp."

The involuntary hum of conviction which passed along his audience told that this was no windy brag-gadocio. Those who watched the face of the speaker and beheld the inner light sparkling from the altar of a pure soul, through the windows of his haughty eyes; who marked the square massive brow framed in its huge periwig, the strongly-ploughed lines of power about the large nostril and mobile mouth, felt that this was the embodiment of conscious strength.

A murmur of applause greeted his speech. His sad face brightened with a gleam of hope.

“Yes, she shall be saved!” he cried. “His Majesty must be induced to return from Hanover at once. He must be implored to remove from his councils this author of pernicious measures. The army and navy shall be remodelled. Sure there will be no lack of good men in a good cause. A militia shall be organised for a defence at home. We will exist by our own power, not through the courtesy of neighbours. Our ships shall scour the ocean and drive the French from off the seas. Our regiments shall sweep back the invaders of our colonies. We will strain each nerve till every fibre cracks to save our distant brothers from the sword of the usurper: for God favours the just cause, and there is no cause more just than the defence of hearth and home!”

Men and women held their breath as they listened to his words, and burst into a prolonged shout when his voice died away. His enthusiasm had kindled the flame of dormant patriotism in their breasts. Men gripped one another by the hand, women laid their heads on each other's enamelled bosoms and wept. The young Prince of Wales declared in his ardour that he would go forth as did his grandsire at Dettingen and win his knightly spurs. Rich men rallied round the orator offering their wealth for the speedy equipping of regiments, promising each to retire to his county, there to enrol his tenants for the cause. The old Duke of Tewkesbury swore

that five hundred horsemen should be mounted at his own expense, and that my Lady Grizel should solemnly present them with their colours. The eyes of that maid of honour sparkled now with tears, and she quite loved the old man as she embraced him, vowing that she would herself don male attire to lead them into battle. Lord Bellasis (brother to the Honourable Jack), devoted hitherto to 'whist, wine, and women, kissed the nervous hand of Mr. Pitt, who, exhausted with emotion, was leaning half-fainting against the landing-rail.

"Look at me, sir," he said, "and be of good cheer. I swear to you by the sun that tips those clouds with light that I will change my way of life ! I am still wealthy, in spite of the ravages of play. Before many months are out, tidings shall come from across seas of the prowess of Bellasis's regiment. My brother here, who hath seen much service, shall go with me. We will come back victorious or take our rest by the banks of the Mississippi."

Mr. Pitt laid a trembling hand upon his head, and blessed him as he pointed with the other to the sky.

"Go, young man," he said, "and God be with you. See yonder orb rising in his might to warm the wet earth after her sleep. Nature for many hours hath slumbered, but now with strength renewed she will battle like a refreshed giant during the coming day. Be this our omen. We

have slept too long. Now we are awake, earnestly willing—all of us—to bear the brunt of the heat as of the burthen.”

Lord Bellasis wound his arm about his brother's neck, who returned the embrace, though his eyes wandered uneasily between Lady Gladys who unheeded had sunk unconscious on the grass, and Lady Grizel who was kneeling beside Mr. Pitt.

“Oh !” cried Lady Grizel, “that I were but a man. I protest that I seriously have half a mind to put on a sword and boots. And yet it is less shame to be a woman when I look at that abject thing on the bench yonder !”

In sooth his Grace of Newcastle was in a piteous plight. He was not an ill-meaning man. Pitt's scorn was eating into his very marrow, and as he writhed and sobbed he began to contemplate the possibility of being torn to pieces on his way home by an exasperated multitude. For if the quality had been driven momentarily to throw off their mask, what was the effect of his rhetoric on the more easily guided minds of the simple folk ? Though they said little they were strongly moved, and as they surged to and fro were preparing to vent their ardour by dragging the patriot's coach back to town. He, panting and exhausted, turned at Lady Grizel's speech, and looking on the miserable Duke, perceived that he must protect the crouching minister from the result of his invective.

“Come, Duke,” he said, “we will travel together. We have much to settle, for the King must be sent for by special messenger.”

The sun rose and illumined the smeared complexions of beaux and belles, sadly disimproved by unaccustomed emotions. The Princess Dowager, and my Lord Bute, and Mr. Stone alone of all the throng had remained stolid.

The tutor saw with misgiving that this ex-cornet of guards was not a mere Quixote, but a genuine patriot whose lofty integrity had seemed to his mistaken eye but rhodomontade. This man who had been so long in coming had come at last, and threatened to bear down all the comfortable bulwarks of bribery and sinecure with pitiless hand. His own patron Newcastle had crumbled into impalpable powder. He saw the not far-distant day when he would be himself exterminated by the uncompromising broom. It behoved him to protect himself by new batteries, and it became more than ever necessary to chain to his interests this maid of honour who instead of succumbing at once had picked up his gauntlet and flung it in his face. Yes. That wild siren had an unaccountable knack of weaving her webs round everybody. The austere Pitt had rallied from his exhaustion to pat her cheek at mention of the sword and boots. Half these lordlings who suddenly threatened to become virtuous would turn like weather-vanes at her

bidding. The Princess adored her. A strong effort must be made to fashion a pad against disaster out of the self-willed beauty.

Her Highness and my Lord Bute remained unmoved by Mr. Pitt's oratory, because their bosoms were so filled with indignation at his arrogance that there was no room in them for any better feeling. The Princess was daily falling more and more under the influence of the favourite, and that pompous lord instinctively dreaded the revolutionary principles of the people's hero. The sublime manner in which he put royalty aside as though it were a cumbersome state-chair was wormwood to his prejudices. He was all for universal prostration before the crown, more especially now that he himself basked in the full rays of royal favour. A man who was diametrically opposed to his own views, and who possessed the sacred gift of governing a sea of men by a few words, was in his eyes a very dangerous person, and it is always well to be rude to a dangerous person. So clearing his throat he said harshly to Mr. Pitt, "Sir, if you are not too great, be good enough to call for her Highness's barge."

The latter was so deeply immersed in whirling thoughts as not to hear the silly insult, and this enraged my lord still more. From this moment it became evident to the dim mind of the Scotch favourite that if Mr. Pitt elected to put on airs he should come to hate him very much indeed. Then prudence

whispered to him of the Prince of Wales's *début*, and the dangerous hopes of a sudden raised by his behaviour in certain quarters. Of course the boy must be taught that Princes of Wales may not flirt with young ladies like other people. This folly must be nipped in the bud and that speedily. But Newcastle, and Fox, and Stone were quite capable of giving much trouble if their interests urged them so to do, and the help of this meteor (he was sure he was only a meteor) might be needed to checkmate them. On the whole then it would be advisable to temporise. My lord therefore determined to swallow his choler for awhile, to bid the Princess be very civil and make much of Mr. Pitt at Leicester House, and then when the time came—having used the ladder he would kick it down, after the usual manner of men in this our wicked world. He grinned at the Princess, who looked hideous in the dawn, and actually stooped so far as to go himself in search of the royal boat.

When he came back, where was my Lady Grizel? That madcap was never to be found when wanted. Dear, dear! everybody seemed to combine to treat the Crown with scant respect.

Lady Grizel was screened from sight by a tree, and was exchanging a few hurried words with a man. The excitement over, she had observed her brother standing among the mob with a grey pallor on his face and his long hair hanging dishevelled

about his ears. She saw that something was wrong, and hastened to seize her opportunity.

"I have committed murder!" Jasper whispered incoherently. "Woe is me, I have shed innocent blood. I cannot bear it. I was a fool to think I could lead this life. I will leave the country and commence a new career."

"What do you mean?" asked his sister, surprised.

"The world and I are at daggers drawn. I owe it nothing. Its hand is against mine—but I have shed innocent blood unwittingly. Sister, I have done much for you—have supplied you with money for your wants, no matter how. Return the favour. Get me a pair of colours that I may go and fight away this stain."

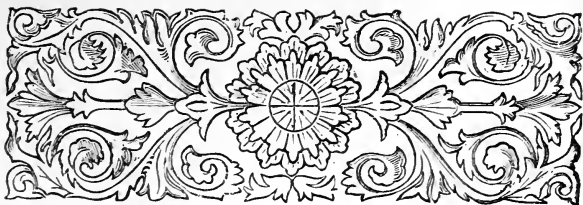
"A duel!"

"No; not a duel. Never mind how 'twas done. Do this for me at once."

"Be it as you will," returned his sister sadly. "If you are killed I shall be quite alone—and perchance I may soon find myself in a grievous strait. But you must live for my sake—let this remembrance be a saving talisman!"

Lord Bute was bellowing after the maid of honour. So she tripped away to take her place beside the Princess, and as the barge shot swiftly down the stream in the fresh air of morning she marvelled at her brother, who was a riddle to her. What could he have done which should upset him so? Murder!

Nonsense. It must of course have been a duel. Change his way of life? What way of life? He was so over-sensitive and enigmatical. Strange that his feeling towards the world should be so clear an echo of her own. Could the mere fact of a bend-sinister have so embittered the poor fellow? Yet what was that to the wrong which she had undergone, and lived?



CHAPTER XIII.

OVER THE SEAS AND FAR AWAY.



R. PITT spoke the word and the spell was broken. The country rose as from a charmed sleep, resolved to endure the insolence of France no more. With the huzzas of the populace in his ears the Duke of Newcastle resigned office, and Mr. Pitt became Secretary of State, with his dear friend George Grenville under him as Treasurer to the Navy; and very pleasant he thought it would be to have always 'so trustworthy an ally at hand.

Public enthusiasm knew no bounds. Everywhere hammers were clinking, vessels taking shape, men being drilled, uniforms being fashioned. Young lordlings were to be seen daily in the coffee-houses poring with wrinkled foreheads over "Bland's Discipline," feeling like sucking generals. The order went forth that a militia was to be organised at once

as a national defence, lest that formidable array of flat-bottomed boats which were lying on the Gallic seaboard should be intended for a descent across the Channel. Beacon-fires of warning were arrayed along the cliffs, look-out men were stationed, and popular excitement rose to such delirium-pitch that upon the casual explosion of a pop-gun or the roll of a mountebank's drum, villagers turned out in panic to defend their threatened homes. Grocers left their shops, shoemakers their stalls, to march round the squares in tight uniforms. Bands were blaring martial music by day and night, business was suspended, and many an honest tradesman woke from his dream of glory to find himself not a hero but a bankrupt. The energy of the new minister banished all despondency. He preached the stern maxim that no price was too dear for the repurchase of England's honour; that she must crush her national foe now or succumb for ever in the attempt. Two thousand disaffected Highlanders were shipped across the Atlantic without a "by your leave." A squadron was rapidly got together for the East Indies, a second for the West, a third for the coast of Africa. The people were earnestly adjured to put their shoulders to the wheel. Bounties were offered for able seamen. Subscriptions to defray preliminary expenses were opened in coffee and chocolate houses, and within a few weeks the sum thus raised without pressure amounted to

no less than a million and a half sterling. But this was a mere drop in the sea to hungry Mr. Pitt. To put his plans in practice he required soldiers, and soldiers, and yet more soldiers. During the reign of his predecessor certain regiments had been feebly got together with the vain proviso that they were not to serve out of England, and that they were to be disbanded within three years. Foolish conditions! Mr. Pitt laughed at them, for he was himself prepared to undergo all privations, and it seemed only fair that others should make a sacrifice as well. He ordered these regiments to the sea-coast at once to start forthwith for America. Those who were so unpatriotic as to resist were to be kept in durance till their ships sailed. Vessels returning homesick from a long voyage found themselves intercepted at the Nore and recommissioned before they had time for remonstrance. Still the hungry maw of Mr. Pitt gaped wide for men. He passed an act whereby all thieves and smugglers were decided to be fit food for powder. Vagrants were collected from the lanes, the infamous houses were ransacked, players were torn from the stage, and their tragedy queens packed off to weep for them in Bridewell. The military prisons were full to bursting, and were constantly refilled, though their contents were drafted off from time to time in a close barge to Gravesend, thence to be guarded to

Chatham Barracks pending a wholesale exportation to the colonies.

And still the cry was, "Men—more men!"

Then a system was borrowed from the tactics of the East India Company. Bodies were organised to find fresh recruits, which were called kidnap-gangs for the army, and press-gangs for the navy. And now London woke up to a new outrage, and, lulled by the cry of "patriotism," speedily grew used to it; for was not the populace inured to injustice? Sons and husbands disappeared none knew whither. Servants and 'prentices were hurried off to crimping-dens. From time to time a lad might be seen rushing down a street clad only in a night-shirt in full daylight, followed by a cry of "Stop thief!" "I am no thief," he would say; "I am flying from the authorised traffickers in human flesh, the Government crimps—save me!" Then the mob would belabour his pursuers and administer, maybe, a ducking as a protest against too much zeal, but there their anger stopped. No doubt it was unpleasant to be forced will-he nill-he into an uniform, but Mr. Pitt wanted men and Mr. Pitt must have them. Besides—and this was an important difference—the kidnapped one was to return crowned with laurels after a glorious campaign, whereas the victims of the E. I. Company languished generally till they died in soul-subduing Indian slavery. The people were used to the proceeding

as an institution, and therefore looked with lenient eyes on the harsh decrees of their hero. So even Mr. Pitt, the pure and immaculate, stooped to do evil that good might come, and the people forgave him, and cheerfully bore their share of the burthen, and were dazzled and infected by his belief in his own powers.

Not so his Majesty—who hated Mr. Pitt more than ever for dragging him from beloved Herrenhausen and the fat sultanas. Had he dared he would have retained Newcastle in office, in spite of popular outcry. For he loved Hanover and did not love England, and knew too well that the stern patriot's opinions were in all ways opposed to his own. But the Duke of Newcastle, whose eyes were opened to the danger, went down on his knees in the royal closet, imploring his sovereign for once to show a little wisdom; and his sacred Majesty kicked all his servants with his royal boot, and howled and lamented—but gave way. He tried to make terms with Mr. Pitt, but there was no wheedling this stuck-up fellow.

“Deserve my confidence,” he said at last, “and you shall have it.”

But the new minister seemed to set little store by his King's urbanity.

“I am the voice of the people,” he returned coldly. “What they will, that shall I speak!”

I, who looked on the patriot as the demigod of

my juvenile days, am compelled nevertheless to admit that there was a touch about this speech of the theatrical effect which coloured all Mr. Pitt's actions without seriously marring them. When he was younger he always made an excuse for holding back that he was in hopeless disgrace with the Crown. At this moment he was in deeper disgrace than usual, yet came he forward. It was his interest to conciliate the King, who might, had he chosen to remain stubborn, have tied his hands. Yet he came forward with the grand independent air of a Brutus—because he had his sacred Majesty on the hip. Everybody looked to the patriot: if the King turned obstinate the House would in all probability decline to vote money for beloved Hanover. Hence the submission of the master and the domineering attitude of his new servant. But the minister was not quite pitiless. In consideration of the King's grimaces, he agreed to accept Newcastle as a colleague, who from this moment was a puppet in his hands. By rule he was required to have certain of his orders approved by his coadjutors and the Admiralty lords. He would not break a rule, but to make these lords feel their subserviency, he commanded his secretary to hold a piece of white paper always over his instructions, that those who wrote might be kept in ignorance of what they signed.

Lady Grizel kept her promise to Jasper, who would give no reason for his eccentric conduct,

showing only an urgent desire to be gone. He was duly enrolled in the regiment raised by my Lord Bellasis, lying now at Gravesend, hourly expecting orders. She obeyed his behests because he seemed quite bent upon departing, but at the same time combated the whim with all her might; for, notwithstanding much forced merriment, she began vaguely to dread the basilisk eye of Stone, although she was fully prepared to fight him tooth and nail; aye, and the assembled hosts of heaven and hell to boot if needful.

It is hard for a woman to know that she has a single-handed battle to fight, and that there is no one to carry her off the field if worsted. A friendly arm is a necessity to all women, however apparently independent, and Jasper's was the only arm in all the world upon which Lady Grizel could lean with safety; yet here was he going a million miles away, to die in a ditch probably. How selfish all men are! She stood on the brink of an abyss whose depth she might not gauge; he was the one person with authority and interest sufficient to pluck her thence; and he was deliberately preparing to leave her to herself. And in how intense a solitude she would find herself when he was gone she felt with sore misgiving! Toast of the town, reigning belle, worshipped by one sex, envied by the other, she knew that in all that brilliant court over which she ruled by divine right of beauty, there was not one

single individual who was to be trusted as a friend. Her clear intelligence told her how utterly vain, frivolous, heartless, was the aristocratic society in which she moved; how delighted her smirking rivals would be if haply she tripped and tumbled down; and in moments of impatience she almost yearned for the old hungry grinding days of squalor wherein she had sported barefoot, a gleeful maiden. But then reflection came, and she chid herself for the folly. As there is no rose without a thorn, so is there no earthly advantage without its drawback. What mattered it after all if her heart were shrivelled? no one could see it. Was she not peerless among the beautiful? and did not all the beaux vie in offers to pour money at her feet—the one thing that lacked to make her state most enviable? Why should she not close with one of them—the wealthiest—and lull her conscience to rest on a bed of swans-down? If retribution came, why she would bear it. Her stuff was that of which heroes are made. If *Anagke* should decide that she must fall, well, she would die smiling with a merry jest, and that spiteful goddess should not be gratified with one shiver of pain. But then, to die game under the approving eye of a friend is one thing, to be tortured alone—crushed out of life like a rat—is quite another. Jasper's departure filled his sister with vague terror. If he had remained by her side she might even in extremity have confided in him, have acted on his

advice, have learned prudence from her melancholy brother, and so have been saved; but he did not. Despite her entreaties, he elected to depart, and in his ignorance gave her the final push downhill before he went.

"I shall be so lonely without you!" she pleaded in a final appeal.

"A trifle the poorer, maybe," he rejoined with his sad smile. "But safe and happy, for every one loves you. You can pick a protector where you list. It is time that you should marry, Grizel. Girls may be wayward, yet in due course must they accept their chains. You might select a golden one methinks, which would sit lightly."

His sister looked straight in his earnest eyes. Chains, forsooth! Was she not wrapped round and strangled by corroding chains, gyves, manacles, almost choked to death?

"Come, Grizel," he continued, "to make my mind easy, promise to select a mate before I go. You would not have the Dukes of Hamilton or Ancaster or Lord knows who besides, and they have consoled themselves you see."

Lady Grizel answered with deliberation.

"Perhaps you are right, and I have been a maid overlong. I am twenty-seven and quite a skinny, hideous hag, and the only mate fitted for my wrinkles is his Grace of Tewkesbury."

Her brother stroked her hair fondly.

“What a strange girl it is ! The Duke of Tewkesbury ! The oldest of your beaux. Portia and the leaden casket, I suppose. His position is a great one, but he is too old for you.”

“If you will have me marry, then will I marry him, because the faded old Jacob hath been faithful to his Rachel for a decade. He is eighty, I am a hundred ; an admirable match. But remember, Jasper, that I shall do it only to please you. I have no wish to marry.”

So Lady Grizel stood tottering on the verge of the gulf for years, and at last her own brother, in his ignorance, tipped her over, and she fell headlong.

What a relief it was to have the matter settled ! And by another. The struggle over, a weight seemed taken off the maid of honour’s mind, and she gave way to skittishness.

“Old ! not a bit,” she laughed, and danced lightly round the room. “He is so young a spark that he must needs go highwayman-hunting. The dreaded Scratchpole robbed him of his family watch t’other day, and a ring meant for me—the wretch !—and, among other indignities, shot dead his running footman, a poor harmless creature who was but obeying orders in scampering after him. This made his Grace so furious that he has sworn to hang the rascal, and their worships have been searching high and low ever since. I do wish they’d catch him, for the Duke becomes quite wearisome about it. Don’t you ?”

"It is quite fair," returned Jasper sadly, "that his Grace should catch and hang the ruffian if he can. It was audacious in the scoundrel to insult the premier Duke of England. Then it is decided, Grizel, that when he formally demands your hand you will accept it? Think once again. Do not wrong the old man, for he is a noble gentleman who deserves a faithful wife."

"If he asks me I will have him," Lady Grizel said with a touch of gentleness, "and, please God, I will be to him a faithful wife."

When Jasper had departed, she sat down to think. Anagke was wrapping her in the veil of the Inevitable, and pointed persistently in the direction of the toothless Duke. He was her fate, there was no doubt about it. As she reflected, the maid of honour was by no means dissatisfied with the results of past diplomacy. Since the Bishop's fête the Honourable Jack made a point of shunning his wife, whilst she, not to be behindhand, embraced every opportunity of leaving him with Lady Gladys, and always appeared delighted to find the two together. Lady Gladys was evidently mystified. It must be admitted that for so prim a personage the Honourable Jack betrayed too great an alacrity to flirt with her. So far well enough. His wife had shocked his sense of propriety, then beaten him down with scornful words. But how would he bear it if she were to take the bull by the horns and

publicly unite herself to another? Prim people are so apt to strain at gnats. There was the rub. When Lady Grizel buried her first self—when the second reckless self rose up to fill its place—she decided that, illusions being dead, the only things which could make life endurable at all would be wealth and lofty station. Gladly would she have quashed her imprudent marriage as others had done before her, but whenever she spoke to Parson Ames about the register he invariably turned her off with evasive answers, while Deborah quieted her fears with soothing words. Was she not there, the faithful Deb? She would watch like a lioness; her mistress might rest easy. And her mistress did rest easy, for child of impulse that she was, no one was ever so careless about her own affairs as she. Then came the discovery that Stone knew her secret—how? This roused her to action once again, and she wrote frantically to Deborah vowing that she must and would have Mrs. Hanmer's register-book in her own possession.

“Sweet madam,” Deb replied, “let matters be till the Royal Family come next to the Bath. My parson will not part with the volume, and would curse me if I stole it. We will put our heads together when you come, and I will do all I may to please my dear mistress.”

Well, well! What was the use of fuming? In a few weeks she would be rumbling through the

ruts and jolting over the holes in the Princess Dowager's great coach as usual, and once arrived at Bath, would obtain access to that register somehow and destroy it; then snapping her fingers at Stone and all the world, she would fearlessly carve out her fortunes as should seem best to her. Sickening qualms came over her at times. Was the game really worth the candle? Would it not be best after all to give up scheming, and retiring into Saxony, to abide there to the end with her friend the Electress? There is a satisfaction for its own sake to the female mind about plot and counter-plot, mine and countermine. Moreover Jasper urged her strongly in the direction of her inclinations. Thanks to Mr. Pitt and his war, the Honourable Jack was about to vanish again, and there really was no cause for present uneasiness. Low spirits are bad for both physical and moral health; conducive to wrinkles; injurious to digestion.

Lady Grizel arose from her seat strengthened in her resolve. She would continue to be the wild madcap who brightened Leicester House till the time came to assume with the family diamonds the name and dignity of a Duchess of Tewkesbury. Then she would show what an English duchess should be like—how regal, how overpoweringly magnificent. This matter settled, the maid of honour resigned herself to her brother's going, and even busied herself with regard to little comforts

for his voyage, finally placing him under the special protection of that veteran warrior—the Honourable Jack.

Jasper and Sim sat on a grassy bank overlooking the Thames and Tilbury Fort. The river was alive with shipping whose white sails glanced like seamews in the glorious sunshine backed by a dense fog which concealed London. Gravesend and Tilbury were both as lively as swarms of troops could make them. Everywhere resounded the tramp of soldiery, the clink of matchlocks; every man was dressed in uniform—red, turned up with buff and sable, long black gaiters, a regulation bobwig, a high black stock of silk or leather. Here was the genuine panoply of war. No more ghost vessels bearing tatterdemalion crews. A nation of warriors, all speckless, spick and span and neat, were going down to the sea in ships. Stores lay in huge piles upon the landing-stages; open barges disgorged their contents in heaps; closed barges guarded by sentinels drew up at the watergate of the fort opposite and discharged their living freights—able-bodied men of all sorts, restrained from flight, some of them, by heavy irons on their legs.

Jasper watched the great gate close on them with displeasure, though he too wore the uniform.

“Oh England!” he cried, “can the war be holy which is fed by such shifts as this? The sights

one sees daily should break a man's heart had he one left to break. Sons of widows, bread-winning fathers, trepanned and kidnapped, are driven on board like sheep to the shambles. Mothers and wives, left helpless, clamour in vain at prison-doors, and the people do not rise and rend their tyrants. It is well enough for such as I to go and fight, waifs and strays with naught to lose or gain, who cumber the earth with their wretched carcasses. And right glad too am I to go, for I cannot put my finger on one just man—not one !”

“Where then is Mr. Pitt ?” Sim retorted slyly.

“A tyrant like the rest,” Jasper answered with dejection. “He invades the people's liberties and grinds them to his will as others have done before him.”

“Mr. Pitt means well,” Sim observed critically, screwing up his eyes as he scanned the passing vessels as if he had the subject at his fingers' ends. “He is personally so unselfish that he expects others to be the same. He looks on the people as an abstraction—a big gun to be oiled and greased and kept bright—not as a parcel of infinitesimal specks, each mote of which can feel and writhe and suffer. In the polishing up of his great engine, it matters not how many of the specks which compose it may be destroyed.”

“A Juggernaut-car crowned with laurels !”

“Well. I for one think he is right. He may

perchance make of England in the abstract an imposing spectacle, and sure the creatures who inhabit it deserve little consideration. How many times, when on the road, have we laughed at the meek way in which the cits gave up their gold? Think of his Grace of Tewkesbury's servants who lay squeaking on their stomachs in the ditch at the bidding of two men—eight of them, great hulking fellows full of beef and beer! I protest I laugh when I think of it, though in no laughing humour. As for you, comrade, I'm disgusted with you—there! What a pother about a bit of carrion."

"A life is a life," Jasper said sharply; "and that poor fellow never did us harm."

"No doubt. But there are lives and lives. The old Duke's is of value; at least he thinks so or would not have made such an outcry about catching cold. He has no sense of fun, and was not amused with my little joke about his shoes. His footman's is of no value; a common rascal who dared to come scampering after us on a carriage horse. You shot him through the head and it was well done, yet you pule like a baby over it."

"You contradict yourself. First people are a fair prey because they are cowards, then 'tis right to shoot them for displaying pluck. Oh, Sim! Sim!" Jasper cried with bitterness. "I am quite as contradictory as you. I war against God and man because I was born. Did I ask to come into

the world? What had I done that I should be branded before my birth, to be through life the scorn of men? Even that I might have endured with patience, for there are others as cruelly placed as I. But this measure was not enough. I am to be the target at which idle Fortune is to fling all her bolts left unemployed. Is Justice dead?"

"Justice is proverbially blind."

"Blind? She should be eagle-eyed. Is there another world in which a large share of good things shall be meted out to me? If so, a hint would calm me, and I would consent to bear—and yet—the history of the world teems with injustice. Job was a whining fool. What special sins had the Kings of the Philistines committed that they should have been so sorely drubbed by the self-righteous Jews? What a disgraceful old sinner was David—yet, forsooth, was he counted of the elect!"

"Not so unjust neither," returned Sim. "The Philistines have been well revenged upon their persecutors since. How about those other self-righteous people, the Crusaders, and their mania for dentistry? Dog of a Jew, hand out thy gold, or out comes thy favourite grinder! Oh! it gives me the toothache to think of it!"

"I grope in the dark," moralised Jasper moodily. "Why should I delight in making others suffer that which, through shameful injustice, I am forced to bear myself? Would it not be better if our own

troubles raised in us sympathy for those of others? Ought we not perhaps to band together like a doomed battalion formed in square, defending ourselves to the utmost, while the wounded are being tended within our ranks? Yes, that would be the noblest attitude. Ave, Cæsar! Morituri te salutant! We perish by the will of Fate; the blood of our despair be on her head! Instead of that, here have I been running a-muck for years against those who never hurt me. Sim! that innocent fellow's death lies heavy on my conscience."

"A wretched serving-man!" cried Sim impatiently, to whom Jasper's tempest-tossed condition was as Hebrew. "At that rate Mr. Pitt will have much to answer for. Think of the food he is preparing for the cannon!"

"I am sick of England—her vices, her cruelty, her cabals. Do you know that with the thought of sailing for a new world comes a new hope? Perhaps the new page may be a cleaner one. In this accursed land all the purer influences seem frozen up. When I come back, if I ever do, may it be as a calmer and a better man. Come with me, Sim, old friend. Let us begin a new life together."

"No, no!" laughed his companion. "Better to bear the ills we have, you know, and they are pretty heavy just now. Thanks to that old lord, the road is too hot for awhile, so I, like you, must turn respectable, though I am too humbly-born to ape

your high-flown sentiments. I wish you soldiers were well gone though, for the military mania becomes oppressive. The parks are so many camps; even Richmond enclosure, time-honoured sanctuary of vagabond and housebreaker, is crowded with recruits. The poor footpad, like the ark-bird, finds never a place to perch; and to crown all, papers about you and me are pasted everywhere."

Indeed many bills were out offering large rewards for the capture of the dreaded Scratchpole and his mate, with descriptions of their bearing and their horses. Useless measures! for Jasper's baldfaced mare was always, as we know, disguised when on duty with a cat-skin patch, while Sim's sorrel broke out on those occasions into a lovely false tail. The Duke's diamond ring had passed through many hands ere he rung for his morning chocolate, and as for his watch, Jasper elected to retain that treasure for his own private use.

"By the way, how about that watch?" Sim asked suddenly. "Though christened* it is so peculiar in make, with Susannah and the Elders on the back surrounded by brilliants, that it would be safer to be rid of it."

"No fear," replied Jasper, drawing it from a pocket. "I'll keep it always in memory of a chapter of my life that's closed. Where I go I am little likely to be searched. Nay, I *will* keep it," he con-

* Name and number-plate removed.

cluded doggedly, and Sim only shrugged good-humoured shoulders as a protest against his mate's caprice.

"The day wanes," he said, "and you may soon be going. Am I to give old Hannah your parting benediction? She was in frantic grief when she learned that you were off. I never saw her so moved. She goes through a weird service under the swinging highwaymen, digging a hole and whispering into the ground, then wringing of her hands at the door of the mimic Fleet, and cursing of Bambridge, and Corbett, and Lord Gowering's daughter. She's only fit for Bedlam."

"There is more in her ravings than we wot of," mused Jasper. "I have often thought that her gabble is a fair mosaic set awry; that her wild actions have a hidden meaning. Take care of the poor soul for my sake, and if I ever return——"

"*When* you return," replied the other cheerily, "you will find respectable Sim Ames in his new office of chief bruiser to the Earl of Bute, ready and willing to start afresh with Scratchpole."

Sim's face puckered into plaits of enjoyment as he thought of the Earl of Bute and the extreme unpopularity which he was drawing on himself. The people, urged by the Methodists, were beginning to take serious umbrage at his equivocal connection with the mother of their future King, to hoot him in public, and insult him on every occasion. Now

Lord Bute, if pompous without, was lily-livered within, and, having no intention whatever of resigning his lady-love, determined to fence his valuable person about, to select his chairmen for their thews and sinews, his footmen for their prowess in the prize-ring.

“Bruiser to the Earl of Bute?” Jasper said, surprised.

“Yes!” laughed his companion. “His lordship has known me many years, discovers that I am a man of trust, and offers me a gravely responsible post as a reward for past integrity. I am to lead the cohort of his protectors—is not that sublime?” Sim capered on the grass in the intensity of his delight. “How much more practical am I than you! Think of the useful friends I shall make, the stewards’ rooms where I shall be at home, whilst you are pursuing the bubble reputation. I will know the number and value of every peeress’s jewels in town, will be the dearest friend of each peer’s valet, will make sure to be informed whereabouts every lord sews his notes before crossing Hounslow Heath. I will be the fancy man of every lady’s madam. Why! I am a prince of mates, a Richelieu of the road, whilst you are content to go blundering off after a paltry medal. But till you return I’ll be a model of propriety—see if I won’t.”

“And how about the table, and the wenches, and your velvet coats?”

“Lord Bute shall pay for all. Till you come back I will wear my livery—a brand-new one as befits my lord’s improved fortunes. We do not remember the shrunk tartan jacket now. Till you come back I’ll be as pure as Mr. Pitt. Here’s my hand on it.”

Jasper smiled gravely, and shook his head.

“A prospect, dear Sim, enough to make a highwayman’s mouth water. Since you scorn the medal, go seek another mate. I have done with the road, I say. The more I think of my past conduct the more I see my folly. My father’s son, though in the first instance wronged, should stand on the defensive. He owes it to his ancestors to shun Tyburn if he can. I shall begin a new life, and give Madam Fate another chance.”

“And if she again repulses you?”

“Then,” muttered Jasper gloomily, “my soul’s undoing shall lie at another door than mine.”

Footsteps approached, and the Honourable Jack stood stiff and starched before them. His innate primness became intensified tenfold when he was on duty.

“Jasper! I have been looking for you everywhere!” he said in sharp chopping accents. “My brother, Lord Bellasis, received orders to start two hours ago. All are aboard by this time save you and I. Hurry, man! I would have left you behind but for your sister’s charge—who you know is an old friend of mine.”

"All her old friends are leaving her!" Jasper said dreamily. "She said so when we parted yesterday. Poor Grizel! May she not regret us overmuch when we are gone!"

The Honourable Jack thought grimly that all things considered she was little likely to regret *him*.

"Come!" he said, "here's a man running towards us. My brother is vastly impatient for military distinction!"

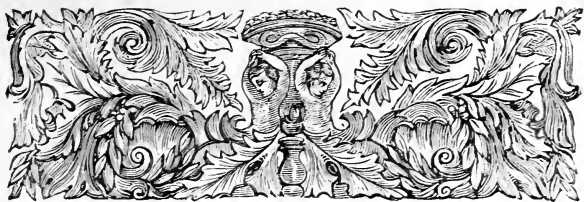
"Not so," returned Jasper. "This man wears the royal livery. It is a messenger from Leicester House."

"I feared the ship had sailed!" panted the messenger. "A note from the Lady Grizel to her brother, and one from the Lady Gladys for Captain Bellasis. Good luck, gentlemen, and a glorious return."

As he took his billet the Honourable Jack turned crimson, which escaped the notice of Jasper, who was engrossed by his sister's passionate farewell. Sim remarked the sudden flush, and thought with pity that it was foolish in a soldier to blush over a love-token like a girl.

Jack and his *protégé* marched hastily to the landing-stairs. The ship lay in mid-channel; a breeze was rising; the yards were manned; ripples danced round the vessel's prow; she began slowly to move. Her deck was crowded with troops, who forgot their private grievances in the intoxication of new uni-

forms and drink. They gave a ringing cheer of eager hope, which rang from shore to shore, to be answered by a prolonged wail from the water's edge. Jack and his companion leaping into a wherry were rowed with all speed to the ship's side. She spread her wings and flew away, while those shut up in Tilbury growled after her that their turn was next, and the huddled mass of deserted wives and mothers sent up a great shriek to Heaven, and wept together in a heap; and Sim, chanting a song of the road, strode lightly back to London to enter on his new service with my Lord Bute.



CHAPTER XIV.

LADY GRIZEL PUTS ON HER ARMOUR.



S the pillow of Royalty is proverbially stuffed with thorns, it must not be supposed that the Princess Dowager's life differed from that of her order. The poor lady's love-passages were disturbed by unpleasant contretemps; for my Lord Bute domineered over her, while his Gracious Majesty waxed wondrous virtuous from out of his harem, and vented his ever-increasing ill-humour by issuing annoying orders about her boy. The royal widow could scarcely call her son her own, and to such exasperation was she driven by the grandsire's drivel as almost to wish that her husband had not died. The young Prince was eighteen, and of age, but, thanks to his mother's repressive system and his tutor's neglect, he was more like an overgrown child than a young man. He was tied to mamma's

apron-string, read decorous books for several hours daily, said his prayers with edifying regularity, slept during forty minutes every Sunday under the Bishop's droning, and came to consider Lord Bute as the wisest of sages. But then he also believed to a certain extent in Stone, who had walked backwards before him with a silver candlestick ever since he was a dot, and Stone's influence, the Princess observed, was exerted more and more in opposition to her own. Stone, moreover, did not admire my Lord Bute's leg. He even dared once to say to his pupil—who of course artlessly repeated the remark—that his lordship would make an excellent ambassador at a court where deportment was the only business; and my lord made the life of his lady-love a burthen unto her on the subject of Andrew Stone.

Mr. Stone, who was wise in his generation, weighed carefully the pros and cons of his position. On the principle that only one Lucifer may reign in hell, it was clear to him that a struggle for mastery was pending in which either he or the favourite must go to the wall, and he made up his mind to fight over his pupil's body to the death. The Duke of Newcastle, although obscured by the glory of the new sun, retained much influence with the King, who could not forgive Mr. Pitt for dragging him from the delights of Hanover; and Stone remained the Duke's firm friend,

Acting on hints from the dark tutor, who knew how to light torches for other men to burn, the Duke suggested to his Majesty that both Pitt and the Princess would be sorely troubled if the Heir Apparent were wrested from them; for Pitt was certainly no fool, and the old Sovereign's infirmities rendered it probable that the new minister would cling for his own sake to his influence over the prospective monarch. The King was charmed at the notion of making himself generally disagreeable, and straightway offered his grandson a separate establishment as the price of deserting his mamma, and the Princess had much ado to prevent her fish-kin from swallowing the bait. Roused to a sense of danger, she cackled out that, *coûte qui coûte*, the odious tutor must be ousted from the household. She called Mr. Pitt to her aid, my Lord Bute, my Lady Grizel. Pitt declined to interfere, Lord Bute looked awful but said nothing, Lady Grizel only laughed. "Pooh!" she cried. "An expedient would be forthcoming if the tutor became too mischievous, and it would be hard if two women could not foil one ridiculous male creature."

Meanwhile Stone's eyes were constantly fixed with anxiety upon Lady Grizel, who was, instinct told him, his only really redoubtable foe. He was her enemy. She knew it, for he had himself thrown down the gauntlet, which she had picked up in her madcap way. Her manner somewhat

disconcerted him though, for several times he had caught the lovely girl looking on him with half-closed eyes, much as a lazy amused cat watches the gambols of a mouse before gobbling it up for breakfast. Certainly, then, it behoved him to look to his arms, one of the brightest of which was the second maid of honour's sister, the Lady Sarah Lennox. Yes—a trusty blade, this, of well-tempered steel—one which should, upon an emergency, pierce all the magnates of Leicester House, pinning them with one deft thrust like herrings on a skewer. With what an ecstatic countenance did the tutor extol the maiden to his pupil, casually pointing out that mamma would of course disapprove of attentions in that quarter as the damsel was not of her own choice. And was it not always so? And was not this one of a young man's first inevitable battles—a defence of his new manhood against ill-judged maternal affection? He stirred up Mr. Fox, too, at Holland House, dilating upon the honour of alliance with royal blood; but that calculating and selfish person merely smiled as he looked on the ground, cautiously remarking that he would think about it.

Stone smiled grimly, therefore, when the Princess announced that she was ready for her annual sojourn at the Bath; laughed outright at her alacrity to escape from the cross old King and his fat mistress who insulted her. He laughed, for he

knew right well, which the Princess did not, that Mr. Fox and his wife and Lady Sarah were already established at the Bath in lodgings over against Hetling House, where her Royal Highness usually stayed; and he reflected complacently that no better incentives to dallying could be found than the romantic flower-strewn glades by Avonside, and the idle purposeless life affected by the water-drinkers. Nothing could have suited his purpose better than this summer journey, for once at Bath he would make a point of looking up Parson Ames and securing himself, through him, against attacks from the maid of honour, and would, at the same time, carry fire and sword, by means of innocent Lady Sarah, into the Holy of Holies of the Princess Dowager and my Lord Bute.

It was a rare show for the delectation of the scum when the royal cavalcade started from Leicester Square. First rode (by virtue of his office in the favourite's household) our friend Sim Ames, in the gorgeous livery lately assumed in his new-blown pride by my Lord Bute. Then came four running footmen in petticoats, with long staves in their hands and torches slung quiver-fashion to light the road at nightfall. Then two great coaches, made extra-strong to hold her Royal Highness's women and large boxes, having huge baskets fixed by straps underneath for the reception of loose clothing and stray articles. Then the

royal coach and six, with eight footmen clustering behind—a splendidly gilt and ornamented vehicle, containing the Princess, Prince George, and the two maids of honour; furnished, moreover, with a comforting receptacle for wine and cake, and a broad place in front for musicians, whose business it was to discourse sweet music while the royal lady dosed. She had an excellent strong tone when asleep, which overpowered their dulcet strains and greatly edified the two maids of honour, who sat bolt upright or lurched or slipped off their stools of repentance opposite, according to the condition of the highway. Beside this carriage rode Stone on a fine mare, and behind it rolled that of his Grace of Tewkesbury, who joined the procession as Lady Grizel's accepted suitor, and was the more welcome on account of his large retinue.

Mr. Pitt's lumbering chaise, with its light-blue liveries, brought up the rear. The excitement and wear and tear of his new office had stricken down the minister with a bad attack of gout, and he lay swathed in flannels, faintly acknowledging the acclamations of the populace by a nod of his periwig and a kindly movement of his long fingers. My Lord Bute occupied a seat by his side, for he judged this a fitting opportunity to indulge the minister with his views—now that the invalid was at his mercy, safely boxed up till they reached Barnet. Between this and then he would discourse

with an angel's eloquence, and who could tell what he might not achieve? As he droned out his words like minute-guns he was satisfied with the effect of his discourse, for Mr. Pitt did not fall asleep. On the contrary, his eagle eye gleamed from under the periwig, and he was all attention, for his clear intellect perceived more in the Scotchman's babble than that solemn person was himself aware of. He had declined to mix himself in the squabbles of Stone and the Princess, judging that such linen was too foul for his touch. But this new cabal was quite another affair, and a serious one too—for was not a young woman at the bottom of it? What if the little Delilah were in sober truth to shear this fledgling Samson and hand him over to the Philistines? Fox would have it all his own way; Newcastle would return to power; whereas at present both were out of the field. Well knowing Fox's political tenets and private character, Mr. Pitt trembled for tottering England under such a ruler—a man devoid of probity, who would sell his grandmother to the surgeons for a shilling. Newcastle was incapable, but this man was base. Money his god, greed his religion, in his hands England would be lost. At the horrid prospect the invalid groaned aloud. He must bestir himself; must even, perhaps, stoop to soil his hands with mire. The arrogant meddling tutor must be shown his place, the little girl be told to

nurse her doll, Mr. Fox be put *hors de combat*. How? Lord Bute, delighted to see by his knitted eyebrows that the Great Commoner (for so people were beginning to dub Mr. Pitt) was in a dilemma, thought it time to come benignly to the rescue. So placing a finger familiarly upon his shoulder, he said in an oracular whisper: "Formidable, eh? Be cheerful. Let's put it to the women. We'll ask Grizel."

This counsel appearing wiser than that which usually fell from the favourite's lips, Mr. Pitt nodded, and prepared himself for slumber. But Lord Bute, who conceived himself to be in a happily persuasive vein, would not let slip his opportunity. Again rapping out a familiar finger, he commenced to coo in dove-like fashion concerning certain *protégés* who panted for sinecures; upon which Mr. Pitt raised himself slowly from his cushions and, stopping the chaise, pointed sternly to the Duke of Tewkesbury's coach, wherein that ancient lover was dreaming between jolts with half-dislocated neck of his adored. "My lord," he said coldly, "I am ill and need rest. I will travel alone. The disgraceful past is blotted out. I will have none near me but honest men."

Lord Bute left Mr. Pitt's chaise with his grandest air and smile, but with rage gnawing at his vitals. Newly raised himself from patrician poverty, he was very sensitive to slight. "All low-bred ad-

venturers," he muttered, "are puffed up with an instant of success. But I'll be revenged on him." During the remainder of the day he sat brooding beside the limp-necked old Duke, who snored and sputtered; and as he sat, his meditations grew into a chain whose links were to bind into consistent shape his future conduct. Lord Bute was insolent and cowardly, rash as well as timid, with an abundant share of that caution which distinguishes the Scotch. Mr. Pitt, he reflected, was too powerful an ally to be cast aside in a moment of pique. He must be used now and trampled upon later. A council should be held forthwith, with the Great Commoner in the chair, for the undoing of Lady Sarah. Then Mr. Pitt himself should be upset, and the populace be assured that he was a wind-bag. But the *οι πολλοι* are obstinate creatures, and might stick to their new idol. What then? As he ruminated the favourite wagged his head. He would prove himself to be a Macchiavelli. He had long felt within himself a nascent genius for statecraft. He held the Princess a willing captive; the Prince, her son, respected him. He would so arrange matters as to throw all the odium of Sarah's discomfiture upon the minister, and himself be full of indignation at such tyranny. He would comfort and console the boy under his trials—nay, would even (and this was a genuine stroke of genius) take his part against his over-fond parent—and like the

hermit crab, having eaten its original occupant, would make himself a comfortable residence out of the juicy mollusc's shell.

Mr. Pitt, he thought, Mr. Pitt, the single-minded and ascetic, was just the pure-souled man to fall a victim to such vulgar treachery. And in this he was right; for, conscious of his strength, the minister was prepared to make enemies, and recked not of their number. As his fame grew, so did the adoration of the people and the envious shower of broadsides and libels. He only smiled at the small spite of the press.

"It is like the air, a chartered libertine," he said, "with a right conceded of prattling about matters beyond its ken. Timid people are terrified at anathemas in print who would only laugh could they recognise the human geese who hide their littleness beneath an anonymous cloak.

The King dreaded him for beloved Hanover's sake; so now did Bute, and, of course, the Princess; and so did Mr. Stone. This did not look like attaching to himself the prospective sovereign; especially as he was selected for an unconscious scapegoat in the "Sarah matter," and was not likely to earn thereby the affection of the young lover.

Mr. Pitt had not been two hours in Bath before his haughty air turned one against him who was prepared to become an adherent. Not that the twain could ever have worked together. This person

was no other than light-hearted, ugly, delightful Colonel Wilkes of the militia, who at Fulham had been delirious in his praise. Under a thick crust of cynicism, the lively Colonel concealed a good heart. The glory of the phoenix which rose out of Newcastle's ashes roused for a moment to enthusiasm the better portion of his nature. He was ready to embrace the glittering bird's cause and to go all lengths. Eagerly and publicly he endorsed the *mot* of Prussian Frederick, who observed that England had been long in labour, but had at last succeeded in giving birth to a *man*. In the year '57 Colonel Wilkes spent the last of his patrimony of seven thousand pounds in securing a seat in Parliament, and in accordance with the venal spirit which was the besetting sin of his age, he settled in his own mind that for the future the nation was bound to provide an income for him. He wrote complacent notes to ministers, demanding as a right all sorts of snug positions. A seat on the Board of Trade, the Embassy at Constantinople, the governorship of hazy colonies in the New World. On all sides he was snubbed, but did not for that reason lose heart.

With the advent of the phoenix, of course a better time had come. To him he writ a letter "desiring to enter on a sphere of usefulness, as a small share of talent fits a willing man for active life." Among the chameleon chances and changes of politics, the

writer vowed that he could "owe nothing to any man but Mr. Pitt."

Mr. Pitt burned his letter, and, coming upon his gouty chair in the Orange Grove, Colonel Wilkes (nothing daunted) stopped the chairmen and gaily twitted the Commoner for want of manners in leaving the document unanswered. Mr. Pitt turned on him his piercing eye and coldly bade him, before begging, to reform the scandals of his life; whereupon the other bit his lip and laughed, swearing that virtue delights in being rude. The Commoner directed his bearers to pass on, but the Colonel placed himself straddle-legged across the way, vowing that he was an angel with a warrant, specially instructed from above to check the career of Balaam's ass.

"Beware! beware!" he cried in mock-heroic tones. "Of all faults the most pitiable is that of being in advance of your age. You won't do as a patriot at all, for you ape the austere, unmodish manners of ancient Greece. Vastly pretty on the stage, as shown to us by Mr. Garrick, but in real life preposterously absurd. The light of such prodigious virtue as you affect shines strangely on the general corruption. Purity is amusing while it is new, but after a while it will pall and disgust. Besides, it is not a paying game. Why, I could beat you out of the field myself any day. You had best employ me lest I take it into my head to set up as a rival. I must gain a living somehow, since my

purse hath been drained. Come, engage me. I am going cheap."

Again the Commoner bade his chairmen to pass on; still the Colonel persisted in his suit.

"We both of us look on the people," he said, "as a means to an end; why then not work in double harness? My common-sense shall temper your poetic ardour. You are for the aggrandisement of England—a vastly proper notion—I am for the profit of your humble servant. You treat the 'people' as an 'abstraction,' I should treat them as individuals who suffer. Which of us two then would be the more popular patriot? At your present rate, believe me, I shall make my fortune, while you only break your heart!"

Mr. Pitt rose up in wrath, with an Olympian frown, and gathered his flannels round him like a toga.

"Rake! debauchee! blasphemer! let me pass!" he cried. "I will purge my flock, please God, of all diseased sheep; therefore you and I may never work together."

The lively Colonel bowed low and stood aside, then moved slowly on with a broad grin on his ugly face, for it struck him that the *rôle* of patriot might really be worth the playing. The tide of many a man's career has been turned by an idly-spoken jest.

By-and-by he met his friend Andrew Stone, and the two, linking their arms together, proceeded to

the pump-room. They had much news to interchange, for Colonel Wilkes of the militia had rather eschewed London of late, lest folks should twit him for not going to the war. He was brave enough and reckless enough, was Colonel Wilkes; but he clung to his creature comforts, preferring the orgies of Medmenham and the cosy little dinners at the Cocoa Tree to glory and *soupe maigre*. He was growing terribly out at elbows, and was only saved from the too-demonstrative affection of sundry hook-nosed gentlemen who walked in his steps by his seat in Parliament. Therefore it behoved him to do something, and quickly, too, as he explained to his friend the tutor.

“Who knows,” he said, “whether the bailiffs may not make an ardent politician of me yet? I can talk high-flown fudge as fluently as an Irishman, and really I see no other way of making money. What fun it would be to mimic Mr. Pitt, who has no more idea of a joke than a periwinkle. With what sublime contempt would he wrinkle up his beak at me from his place in the House, bidding the usher to remove this flea! What an opportunity, too, of throwing stones into my Lord Bute’s glass house! The blown-out stupid frog! I have sworn some day to punish his insolence.”

Mr. Stone, too, had confidences to make. He laid before his shrewd companion an outline of his perilous position, with a synopsis of the numberless

cabals which occupied the court, and finally disclosed his (as yet) shadowy schemes with regard to the taming of Lady Grizel. But the Colonel shook his head and leered.

"Most serious of tutors," he said, "take the advice of a battered reprobate who hath studied woman down to her finger-nails, and is fain, after all, to confess that she is a sphinx. Make friends, dear sir, of women. Pat them, pet them, coax them, as you would a feline beauty whose purring is pleasing to you. But beware of their claws, for verily they are treacherous and given to scratching. There is no knowing, for instance, of what that ungainly Princess may not be capable, if you rouse her by tampering with her son. You'd marry him, you say, to the black-eyed little gipsy? And what then? Gratitude! Pho! you are a 'prentice in the study of human nature. And handsome Lady Grizel, too—a dangerous, unscrupulous enemy I dare swear. Experience hath taught me to fear a woman with a large firm-skinned white hand like hers. It is like a fragment of an antique statue—as hard, as cold, as perfect. What can it matter to you how many men she marries, provided that you are not one of them? Leave her alone, I say, or you'll rue it."

But Stone would not be convinced. It was such a temptation to hold a dangerous woman like this one in his power. Lady Grizel safely chained, he

knew that he could sleep in peace. He was aware that spiteful Mrs. Hanmer had given up her book containing the fatal register to the old parson who tied the knot. He was also aware that the maid of honour was too constitutionally careless to trouble her head about it, unless danger showed itself to be imminent. He had marked that trait of her character in all the small doings of her daily life. She was continually doing rash things and taking no heed of the consequence until too late to guide the result. But then when the supreme moment came, there was no end to her energy and fruitless efforts. During all these years had she allowed the silent witness of her folly to remain in Ames's care, trusting to the devotion of her late maid for its safe keeping—of Deborah, who had had a hand in the concealing of the letters. But supposing something should suddenly arise which would render it imperative to hold in her own possession the proof of her mistake—why then she would be capable of scaling roofs and walls in search of it, only to break her neck in the attempt.

“Let the lady gang her ain gait,” Wilkes observed, “at least until she shows positive signs of marring your plans. That is my advice.”

But Stone declined to be led by such advice. The register had already been too long neglected. It was urgent to know that it was safe ; so the Colonel with a shoulder-shrug agreed to walk with the tutor

presently to the Parsonage, in order that something might be done about that valuable bit of paper.

The cause of so much heart-burning sat upon the virtues of Jane Hales in her favourite churchyard retreat under the tall trees by the Borough walls. Her garden was looking bright this summer day. Its ancient gravestones were flecked by many a starry patch of light; creeping plants crawled in untrained luxuriance over its hillocks; flowers in profusion grew rank above the dead—sweetwilliam, marigold, snapdragon. Rows of big brown-centred sunflowers nodded their heavy heads against the crumbling bricks to the rhythm of a soft breeze and the twittering of birds. Insects darted like jewels from sunlight into shadow, and the great trees waved and fanned the crisp air solemnly. Lady Grizel sat high on her favourite tombstone clad all in white, her dainty feet peeping now and then from out of a snowy cataract of drapery as they swung, her face shaded by a huge Chinese umbrella, which her aged adorer held poised above her head. She was looking her very best, and knew it. Young Lady Sarah reclined on an adjacent slab in a studied pose, for she could see out of an eye-corner that Prince George was sitting at a window of Hetling House hard by, sighing forth his soul for her. And many a swain has blurted out his love for a less charming object.

Her rosy lips were fresh as the morning, her roguish eyes sparkled as she lectured her pensive elder sister Gladys; her black hair fell in unpowdered curls about her shoulders. She certainly was very pretty, and Lady Grizel admitted as much to herself as she thought of the cabals that were forming round the unconscious girl, and smiled at her childish prattle.

“You are monstrous pretty, scorpion,” she said patronisingly, “and the verdict is of value as coming from an old woman who herself was accounted a beauty once. Ask the Duke here if I was not quite a marvel a hundred years ago.”

“Happy, happy, happy fair!” croaked his Grace, with an amorous twitch of his baggy old cheeks and a blink from his rheumy eyes, which sent his lady-love into a shout of laughter. “The girl is no doubt well-looking, but to my mind a woman is never at her prime till thirty—and you are close on thirty.”

“Thanks for the compliment!” bowed the maid of honour, unveiling as a reward for it a ravishing dimple on either shoulder. “Take my wrapper, Duke. The day is warm. The chit’s a vastly engaging *pantin*, but to hear her babble one would think she were Helen of Troy at least. Listen how she prattles to Gladys of her own future, while that sister’s thoughts are far away—in Canada very likely with prim Jack Bellasis. She is to be Queen

of England, forsooth, because a brat of a royal boy hath kissed her ! I wonder whether at her age I was such a fool."

Then a cloud passed over the handsome face, for she remembered that at her age she had been a much greater fool. Surely it must indeed have been a century ago !

"Well, and why not?" returned the girl sharply. "A King has married a subject before now."

"Henry VIII. married Anne Boleyn," retorted the other dryly, "and he chopped off her head. Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown, my dear, saith the adage. You think yourself ambitious who are not as much so as I am—but do you think I would run so great a risk? No ! Kings may not wed whom they please. Take the advice of the old old woman, and give up Georgy before he casts you from him, which he will do as surely as some day he'll die."

"Never !" snapped the girl, rising angrily. "I love Prince George and he loves me, and we've taken an oath that nobody shall part us. So do your worst, you wicked woman."

Tears of mortification rose to Lady Sarah's eyes, and she stamped a passionate little foot, while George, watching from his window, wondered what the commotion was about.

"Hoighty toighty, what a venomous scorpion !" laughed Lady Grizel. "What tantrums over a little

sound advice. I don't want the lad. There, there! See, he's hanging half way out of window; go to him quick, or he'll tumble out. But don't let her Royal Highness catch you, or you'll both be whipped and sent to bed. Go to him, do. I vow I shall turn duenna in my old age. His mamma is safe in the King's bath by this time, tottering round in a bedgown leaning on Lord Bute. Faugh! I seem to see them both, rubbing the stale unguents from their hot faces with a snuffy handkerchief. How would your Grace like to see me plunged in the foul mess?"

"How you love to tease this child!" murmured Lady Gladys, rousing herself from reverie.

"No thanks to you, you maundering thing!" cried the young lady tartly. "You turn up your eyes and sigh from dawn till sunset, all about that Captain Bellasis, who does not care for you one jot. You know he never writes to you. George writes reams to me—such lovely poetry!—although we meet a dozen times a day. Besides, you know," continued the girl with a toss of her head, "when I am married it will not be fitting that my sister should wed a poor younger son. We will find a foreign prince for you."

Lady Grizel and the Duke were convulsed with laughter, and even moon-struck Lady Gladys smiled at the prematurely royal airs of her sister. The boy and girl had indeed broken a guinea with

solemn rites, and the poor thing actually believed that his Royal Highness would keep his vows.

“Hush, Sarah!” whispered Lady Gladys, turning red. “Captain Bellasis is nothing to me.”

“He embraced you behind a door the day he went away,” cried the scorpion. “You know he did, and then you locked yourself in your room and wept for hours. But he doesn’t care for you a bit, or he would write, and you are mean-spirited to endure the slight.”

Lady Grizel thought dreamily of the Duke of Hamilton and his correspondence, and scrutinised her fellow maid of honour, who turned away to hide a blushing face.

Scorpion was right. The prim young soldier had folded the decorous Gladys in his arms when he came to make his parting bow to the Princess. And she had permitted the embrace, for was it not a pure brotherly kiss? And even if it were not, what harm was there in it after all? The Honourable Jack evidently disliked Lady Grizel for her bold ways. The spectator must have been deceived on that night now long ago, when she seemed to have seen the twain united. There are other women as stately as Lady Grizel, and men in uniform do look so much alike! Ten years ago and more! Anxiously she had watched for a convincing sign, in vain. None had come. It must have been a mistake, for no two human people could keep up a comedy so con-

sistently. Why keep it up? Absurd! and yet—and yet!

Captain Bellasis sought her company, but never asked her to be his bride. Should he do so at the end of the war, what would her answer be? She hardly knew herself. If the Honourable Jack and the toast of the town were really man and wife, why such a pother about concealing the fact? This was the point round which the self-communings of Lady Gladys veered. True, Lady Grizel had only the salary of her office and a few stray sums which she obtained nobody knew how. Lady Gladys was too proper to delve into this matter even in thought. Lord Bellasis did little for his brother. Yet after all, if people are married and love each other (an unusual juxtaposition of opposing premises to start with), surely the joys of love in a cottage may be taken as an equivalent for bread and butter? Lady Gladys dimly felt that the Honourable Jack was not a worthy object upon which to pin her heart, and womanlike adored him all the more for his unworthiness. In obedience to one phase of our contradictory human nature, she felt herself capable of any sacrifice for the Honourable Jack whom she knew to be prim and empty-pated, who in peacetime spent complete mornings over his hair, and pondered about his own goodness as did the Pharisee. Some noble women appear to glory in tying themselves to an unworthy object because by

so doing a heavier call is made upon their unselfishness; and in this at least they are sublime. Of course she must have been a victim of mistaken identity, ruminated Lady Gladys, and as she ruminated it became clear to her that when the moment came she would probably accept the Honourable Jack for life. And so she watched, and hoped, and feared, and made herself wretched anent that which faded more and more into a shadowy chimera the more she worried herself with thinking of it.

She was saved the trouble of parrying her giddy sister's home-thrust by the appearance of the King of Bath, who bowed and smirked under his great white hat at the grille-gate that opened into the Borough Road. Beau Nash was sadly changed for the worse since we saw him last—ten years ago. Then he wielded a pinchbeck sceptre with which he rapped Duchess or Countess indiscriminately on the knuckles. He was autocrat of Bath and Master of the Ceremonies. What signified it that he kept up a genteel appearance by subsidies from the gambling-table—that he arrogated to himself a tax of so many feathers from each pigeon's plucking? He was a necessary piece of furniture, for lords and ladies could not be expected to amuse themselves during their water-drinking, and had no objection to being cheated provided the awful bugbear ennui was kept at a safe distance. In his glittering clothes he always looked like an ourang-outang in livery, and even

Princesses of the Blood had entered into the joke of humouring his antics.

But now ten years and more have passed, and he is a shrivelled old monkey with no teeth in his chattering jaws, with bleared eyes, with cavernous temples which show the skull-formation through a tight covering of yellow parchment. The new generation scoffingly declares that he should be buried out of sight by public subscription ere he falls to pieces. He looks like a galvanised corpse in wedding raiment. New beaux are waiting for his shoon. He who always laboured so painfully to be a sayer of good things is dreaded as a gabbler of old stories. His memory, too, plays him false. He makes mistakes at the Assembly Rooms as to precedence in the Polonaise. His word is no longer law. He is flouted in the open street till tears of bitter shame cloud his vision. He is lamentably aware of his failing powers, and practises an elaborate minuet of a morning after breakfast with a row of chairs. Each one is labelled according to its rank, and he cocks his hat and grins at No. 1, and leads it to the centre, and there arches his poor stiff back and makes his aspen steps with shrunken shanks ; then ogles No. 2, and raises a lean hand with a turn of the wrist to shake back a point-lace ruffle ; and so on through the ghastly ceremony, till he sinks down dizzy and exhausted with a haggard stare at the empty seats as though the ghostly wit-

nesses of early triumphs had whisked up the chimney, leaving him to rot, and mumble, and decay alone. His aspect is piteous in his peach-coloured satin as he pockets the guineas tossed in compassion by a new comer, and totters off to dream of future fêtes as he sleeps a stertorous sleep under a bandanna, till his man wakes him for the business of the night. Then he rouses himself, paints black his eyes, masks with powder the green hue of death upon his skin, pops on a becoming patch and a great smear of carmine, and is borne—all roses and lilies—in his sedan to the North Parade ; where he will straightway forget the practice of the morning, and be buffeted, and elbowed, and insulted, and held up as a butt for mockery by the Pharaohs who knew not Joseph.

Poor old Mr. Nash ! Poor shattered, battered, painted, disgraceful wreck ! So dreadful a spectacle of a skeleton wreathed in flowers shocks even Lady Grizel, whose own secret trials have helped to harden her woman's nature. She sees him willowing at the gate, whose rusty lock he is too feeble to turn, and tripping lightly down, admits and leads him to a seat.

“The Princess is in the bath and enjoys it much,” he quavers. “A delightful place—O yes—a delightful place—a delightful place. I mind me that twenty years ago the then Marquis of Tavistock said to me as he graciously dipped his

fingers in my snuff-box—said he—dear, dear, I scarcely recollect, I scarcely recollect. But never mind; it was prodigiously entertaining. All the abigails on the back benches laughed themselves into fits.”

The Duke of Tewkesbury looked with displeasure on the pantaloons before him, for was he not a dreadful caricature of himself? Not that his Grace would admit himself to be old. Far from it. He was brimful of life, a very stripling, about to lead to the altar the fairest woman in broad England—unless that wayward person elected again to change her mind. He felt quite a boy, and reflected with exultation that Mr. Meadows would wait for his shoes for many, many years; but yet it was offensive to have this moribund posture-maker thrust hourly under his nose. He did not like it, so moved away. Presently Mr. Nash remembered the object of his coming. Parson Ames of the upper town, who had been ailing for some time past, was dying, and madam, his lady, had heard of the arrival of their Highnesses. Of course the faithful maids of honour were in waiting. Madam Deborah wished to see my Lady Grizel at once. It was vulgar of her and inconsiderate to discourse of death, but such was her message, and Mr. Nash could not help it. His carriage stood at the Hart Inn; would the beautiful young lady allow an old admirer to escort her?

Lady Grizel started. Dying! Of course she would go at once, and Mr. Nash was most obliging. The Duke interfered weakly, declaring that such sights were not fit for such beauteous eyes to look on—sapphire eyes which were loadstars, while her breath was sweet air! But my lady bade him abruptly to hold his peace, whereupon her betrothed appeared so crushed that she laid her large hand upon his shoulder, ordaining in mercy that he might fetch her from the parsonage in two hours' time.

Lady Gladys heeded not her movements, for she had again sunk into the reverie which engrossed all her thoughts, wherein French soldiers were for ever attacking British officers who were left stark and cold upon a field beyond seas. As for Lady Sarah, she marvelled rather at the haste of her tormentor, glad of it though too, for if the teasing scoffer were to go away while the Princess was yet hobbling round the bath with my Lord Bute—why, what a charming opportunity to run and assuage the anxiety of his eager Royal Highness by assuring him with kisses that she loved him quite as much as she had done ten minutes since.

Lady Grizel heeded not the moping and mowing of the King of Bath, as his horses struggled up the steep hill to Ames's parsonage, which stood on the high ground beyond the circus and the fine new houses rising there. She was wondering at the strange state called death, and thanking the good

luck which permitted her to be present at the parson's flitting. The very moment, this, to settle something positive about the register. It was proper that she should keep it in her own hands—no doubt of that. How foolish, to be sure, to have left it unclaimed so long.

Madam Deborah received her on the steps with tearful eyes and a mirthless smile, and leaving the door wide open conducted her patroness upstairs.

“My dear lady,” she said, “I am so glad you’ve come. My old man has been anxious to speak with you this many a day. He’s unconscious now, but will rally presently. Will Mr. Nash come too? We are alone in the house, for the wench hath gone forth to borrow blankets for her master.”

She led the way to an upper chamber, followed reluctantly by Mr. Nash, to whom the sight of a man actually in the grip of the great foe was even more distasteful than was the aspect of a decayed buffoon to his Grace of Tewkesbury.

“No,” whispered Deb, brushing away a tear with her apron. “It is not that. Of course you know it’s as safe in my hands as your own. I had a finger in the business through Madam Hanmer’s misrepresentations, and I will gladly do all I can whilst I live to blot away that past. You can trust me. But he has something on his mind which he will not tell to me. It concerns you though—I know that—for in his delirium your name is ever

uppermost in connection with some wrong done by your father with his help. Oh! but it's awful to die with a secret on one's mind. Were I called on this minute to expire I'd tell our secret to the walls, I would. I should not have moral courage to keep it back. My husband exacted from me an awful oath, by all I hold sacred in this world and the next, that I would never part with his books, but keep them as a legacy in case I should come to poverty. Poor man! What can I do with them? He says they contain secrets each worth a hundred pounds. That I am to sell them one by one and make hard terms. What know I about Fleet marriages? Alack! it is a forlorn thing to be left a widow."

So she would whisper her secret to the walls, would she?

"Never fear, Deb," said her mistress carelessly. "If he dies I will be responsible for your wellbeing. You shall have a good pension when I am wedded to his Grace. I think I will take with me the volume Mrs. Hanmer left."

Madam Deborah looked frightened, and pushed her straggling hair behind her ears in perplexity.

"I dare not do it!" she whispered, glancing at Mr. Nash, who was nodding now in the great chair beside the fire—for there was a fire on the hearth although the weather was warm; and yet the sick man's teeth chattered without ceasing. "You know

that I am your ladyship's humble servant. The book is safe. I will watch over it, and give orders to have it buried with me."

"Nonsense," returned Lady Grizel sharply, "you mean to drive a hard bargain, I suppose?"

"Not so! But I've sworn the oath, and dare not break it. It is too solemn to break. I should never more enjoy one instant's peace. Hist! He revives."

The parson's wife stole on tiptoe to the bedside, then returned to the table.

Lady Grizel was annoyed. What a fuss about the paltry book! Not that it mattered much.

"Deborah," she said, "give me the book. We will seal it up together that none may casually spy into it. Quick! Wax and paper and a seal. Nay. I have my own signet-ring. So shall both you and I be satisfied."

She opened the volume which Deborah drew from a table-drawer, wherein were greasy memorandum-books, and a bundle of dogs-eared papers tossed into a little box. There was the register in Parson Ames's hand, dated all those years back. What mental turmoil, what a process of soul-hardening had she undergone during those years! With a frowning countenance Lady Grizel folded the book into a parcel in presence of Deborah, sealed up one end and was about to seal the other, when the parson's wife, glancing at the bed, gave a cry and

rushed to it. The dying man sat upright gasping, with bared breast and both shaking arms outstretched towards Lady Grizel. His veiled eyes strove to pierce the quickly-gathering film, his yellow fangs, from which the blackened gums had receded, clashed together; he tried hard to speak. His lips formed the words "Lord Gowering;" the rising of the rattle in his throat stopped the rest. His wife buried her face in the bed-clothes, sobbing bitterly.

Drowsy Mr. Nash was waked by the noise, and sat crouched up breathless in an agony of terror with distended pupils—the very counterpart of the man upon the bed. Lady Grizel turned from one to the other undecided what to do, for the parson certainly appeared to have something to say about her father, the wicked Earl. How could it affect her now? He died like a dog so long ago. Her eyes wandered round the room, and happening to fall upon the window, she beheld to her surprise through a chink in the curtains Mr. Stone and his friend Wilkes approaching arm-in-arm. The truth burst on her all at once. It was to be war to the knife, and this was the next move. The register! Careless that she had been not to have imagined it. Craftily planned, Mr. Stone, no doubt. Stealthily she slipped the book out of the parcel with a steady hand, tore thence the register, flung it in the fire, and replaced the book while the dying man glared

helplessly at her as he struggled against the invading thrush, and Mr. Nash glared at him as if he were under a horrid spell.

Parson Ames gurgled and fell back upon his pillow with a sigh. Lady Grizel vanished into a closet, leaving the parcel upon the table, as the two gentlemen entered, who, finding the door ajar, had followed the sound of voices upstairs. A strange picture to come upon unexpectedly. The blinds were half drawn to darken the room. The fire shot up and flickered at uncertain intervals. A man was fighting with death upon the bed; another lay crouching by the fire—Mr. Nash had fainted. A woman knelt sobbing by the bedside. This was apparently an inopportune moment for inquiries. The gentlemen would call again. They did not detect a pair of mocking blue eyes watching them through a glass-door—a perfectly-formed mouth distorted with a curl of scorn. They were about, with muttering apologies, to retire, when Stone caught sight of the open drawer containing the Fleet books and the parcel on the table. The very things about which he had come to speak. He stretched out his hand and took up the half-sealed packet. Deborah's ear caught the rustling of paper. She looked up, and with a cry snatched it from him. He met her haggard look with a smile.

"I beg pardon," he said, "I see you are in

trouble. I will call again later. I knew not that your husband was ill."

"You!" she muttered, pressing the book upon her breast which heaved convulsively.

"Yes—I! You remember a certain night——"

The parson turned with a restless groan upon his pillow. His wife, looking round for Lady Grizel, was surprised to find her gone, and fearful that her husband might say something in his delirium which it were not well for these gentlemen to hear, she implored them to go at once.

"Mr. Nash here!" said Wilkes in surprise. "In a fit! Some water, quick!"

Mr. Nash stirred, and opened his eyes. "My Lady Grizel," he murmured, "take me hence!"

"Lady Grizel!" echoed Stone, starting. "Then that packet!" He seized the parcel from Deborah's grasp, who clung to it and battled with her nails. Stone was too strong for her, however. He tore open the book—a blank book—with the frayed edges of one page torn out. That was all!

Grinding his teeth, he tossed the book on the floor, while Deborah looked on trembling. "Too late!" he cried, with an oath. "Idiot that I have been. She has destroyed it. Yet this was only the duplicate—where are his memorandum-books?—it was a little black book—I've seen it."

The parson's wife stood helplessly by with blanched lips while the dark tutor emptied out the

drawer; and Lady Grizel's head peered anxiously from the closet. He found the book with its clumsily written dates—1740, 44, 46, 47. That was the year. He turned its pages backwards and forwards. Then cursing, dashed it, too, on the ground and stamped on it. "Damnation!" he muttered. "The old fool has broken faith. Mrs. Hanmer must have bought it of him as she threatened. It is torn out, too!"

He turned round and faced Mr. Nash. "Old man, speak!" he cried, shaking him roughly to rouse his faculties. "Lady Grizel was here—where is she gone? Did you see her destroy anything?"

Nash's eyes goggled, his toothless jaws mumbled with the shaking. He saw Lady Grizel in the deep shadow behind his tormentor with her finger to her lips. A faint cunning smile flitted over his face. He rallied and sat up. "No," he murmured. "I saw nothing. I swooned from fright at that goblin parson there——"

Stone, suddenly remembering the parson, cried hastily: "Ames! I'll wring the truth from him. Did he sell that first pencilled register or not? Was it destroyed by him or by Mrs. Hanmer? What could that matter, though, since it was clean gone?"

"I fear you are too late to ask him," Lady Grizel observed politely, as she moved forward with

demure steps out of the shadow, "for verily the parson hath given up the ghost."

Deborah, with a prolonged shriek, threw herself upon the corpse and tore her hair.

"Deborah!" her mistress said, as she drew the sheet with a kindly movement over the face of the defunct. "Do not grieve. So long as you live I will look after you. A good servant surely deserves consideration. Come, Mr. Nash," she continued, holding out her hand. "Let us respect the presence of death; I see his Grace approaching, and would spare him so painful a spectacle."

With a stately curtsy to the baffled tutor the maid of honour sailed out of the room and departed as she came, in Mr. Nash's coach, bidding both the old gentlemen to observe as they jolted through Queen's Square that his young Royal Highness was plodding round the lawn with his arm clasped about the trim waist of Lady Sarah. With a mischievous laugh she tapped her fan against the window and nodded as she observed to her venerable beaux, "What a public exhibition! If Prince George emancipates himself, then will the skein of court-intrigue be tangled!"

Stone meanwhile stood biting his nails. His quiver had been torn from him, his bow was arrowless. His hold upon his adversary had crumbled. She had smitten him hip and thigh, and was preparing to follow up the blow. He read as much in

the vengeful gleam which shot from under her silken lashes as she swept by.

“I told you that they scratched,” Wilkes said, laughing, as he drew his friend away. “Better admit your defeat and humble yourself at once.”

“What will she do? I never should have thought,” Stone mused, “that after what I told him he would have dared to sell that document. Mrs. Hanmer must have bled for it; or was it Lady Grizel? Then is she not so reckless as I fancied, and all the more dangerous, therefore. Perhaps Mrs. Hanmer did it in remorse. But he was a fool to part with it. Such a paper as that, if only put by long enough, would have gained in value like old port. However, it is gone, and through my own fault, I suppose. The parson’s mouth is shut for ever. There is nothing to be done with the maid. Amen!”

END OF VOL. I.





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